

**THEATRE AND ANTI-THEATRE: CORROSION OF SELF IN
THE SELECT PLAYS OF SAMUEL BECKETT, TENNESSEE
WILLIAMS, EDWARD ALBEE, TOM STOPPARD
AND JACK GELBER**

**A
Thesis**

Submitted to



L OVELY
P ROFESSIONAL
U NIVERSITY

**For the award of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D)**

**in
ENGLISH**

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PUNJAB

2017

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis titled “*Theatre and Anti-Theatre: Corrosion of Self in the Select Plays of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber*” is an original research work carried out by me for the award of degree of Ph.D in English at Lovely Professional University, Phagwara District Kapurthala. It is further certified that no part of this thesis has been submitted either in part or full for the award of any other degree/ diploma by me to this or any other University.

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This is to certify that the thesis titled “*Theatre and Anti-Theatre: Corrosion of Self in the Select Plays of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber*” is submitted by **Ms. Varinder Kaur** Regd. No. 41200403 to Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, District Kapurthala for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. It is a novel piece of work carried out by the candidate under my supervision. As of my knowledge, the present study has so far not been submitted here and other University, for the award of degree.

It is further certified that the candidate has fulfilled all the requisite conditions/requirements laid down by the University. Accordingly, the present thesis is eloquently fit for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge here the help, guidance, inspiration and encouragement that I received from my husband, Mr. Jatinder Pal Singh, Advocate. I am extremely thankful to my father, Mr. Harbhajan Singh, who had been a true ideal for me and my mother, Mrs. Swaran Kaur, who gave full support for the completion of this research project. My darling son, Apaar, supported me in all respects and I put on record his positive contribution. At the outset, I express my deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor **Dr. J. P. Aggarwal**, Assistant Professor Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab who gave me unsparing encouragement and inspiration, his original ideas and critical suggestions helped me to complete the thesis. Indeed, words can't express my thanks and gratitude to Dr. J.P. Aggarwal whose generous guidance, cooperation, valuable suggestions, kind help and expert advice helped me to achieve my aim.

I visited many libraries to collect the research material and I will be failing in my duty if I don't express my thanks to the Incharge of the VTR section of Indo American Research Centre Hyderabad. I am thankful to the librarians of Punjab University, Chandigarh and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar who extended their cooperation to me.

My special thanks to **Dr. Ajoy Batta**, Associate Professor and Head of the English Department Lovely Professional University Phagwara for his co-operation and valuable guidance.

(Ms. Varinder Kaur)

Contents

S. NO	TOPIC	PAGE NO.
1.	Introduction	1-14
2.	Chapter 1: Brief Candle	15-44
3.	Chapter 2: The Anti-Theatrical Devices to Dramatize the Corrosion of Self in Beckett's <i>Waiting for Godot</i> and <i>Endgame</i>	45-95
4.	Chapter 3: Stages of Gradual Corrosion of Self of Beckett's Protagonists: A Case Study of Lucky	96-131
5.	Chapter 4: The Broken, Disintegrated Universe of Tennessee Williams: Drama of Corrosion of Self	132-161
6.	Chapter 5: Albee and the Theatre of Loss: Suicide as a Tool for Survival of the Protagonists of Edward Albee and Beckett	162-191
7.	Chapter 6: Psychoanalytical Analysis of George-Martha Relationship: Neurotic Games of Fun and Corrosion of Self in <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i>	192-222
8.	Chapter 7: Pirandellian Theatre of Sanity and Insanity: Corrosion of Self in Tom Stoppard's <i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead</i>	223-261
9.	Chapter 8: The Junkies and Neurotics of Jack Gelber: Disintegration of Self in <i>The Connection</i>	262-274
10.	Conclusion	275-290
11.	Bibliography	291-321

Abstract

The thesis “*Theatre and Anti-Theatre: Corrosion of Self in the Select Plays of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber*” is focused on the growth of the emergence of corrosion of self of the protagonists of avant-garde playwrights of Europe and America. The two World Wars, the Great Depression and the pervasive vogue of the skepticism and nihilism propagated by Schopenhauer and Fredrick Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1833) inspired Beckett and Ionesco to evolve new ant-theatrical techniques to depict the existential realities of life. Kierkegaard published his thought provoking book *The Sickness unto Death* (1946) and revolutionized art and philosophy by giving his philosophy of nihilism. The present study has examined and investigated the cause and issue of corrosion of self of the protagonists of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber. The conspicuous feature of the British and American plays is the loss of self. R. D. Laing and Sypher Wylie have discussed in detail the deflation of self. It is averred that the Greeks were in harmony with Nature and God; they enjoyed harmony and integrity of life as their life was free from the anxieties and tensions of life. The Greeks and the Elizabethans believed that man is the creation of God as there are divine elements in his soul and mind. The modern philosophers contended that all these religious ideas were illusive and meaningless. Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Karl Jaspers propounded the Existential philosophy and brought revolution in arts and literature. The Existentialists argued that failure is an inevitable fate of man. Albert Camus and Sartre propounded the theory of Existentialism as Sartre contended that “Existence precedes Essence” and he turned down the Platonic

theory of ideas. But in all the major plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter and Albee one finds the pervasive corrosion of self. Ionesco, Beckett and Albee took the challenge and made drastic changes in the themes and plot structure of the plays. Albert Camus wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus* highlighting the absurdity of human existence. The tide of the Theatre of Absurd revolutionized drama. No wonder, modern British and American playwrights depicted the existential absurdity. After World War II the playwrights were confronted with the bewildering problem of the corrosion of self since reality became fluid. War and the Depression of 1930 had brought out skepticism in the world and the wave of antagonism spread everywhere. The Holocaust and the mass killings of the Jews in the concentration camps of Auschwitz led to the decadence of faith. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and the laws of Kepler brought out the concept of the machine-man. The contemporary playwrights were influenced by the image of the mechanical self. Sigmund Freud was a German thinker; his explorations of the unconscious gave a new impetus to thinking. The philosophers projected new ideas and contended that man is but an infinitesimal fraction of the energy that flows through the universe. Freud and Einstein propagated the scientific and rational view of the evolution of man. Religion, rituals and traditions were scrapped and no wonder in all the plays of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber the protagonists suffer the corrosion of self and they emerge too fragile to confront the existential reality of the modern World. The present thesis is an explication of the forces that bulldoze modern man's personality and dehumanize him.

Introduction

The thesis "*Theatre and Anti-Theatre: Corrosion of Self in the Select Plays of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber*" depicts the growth of the emergence of corrosion of self. Eric Bentley in *Search of Theatre* (1953) traces the history of American Drama from Ibsen to the modern times. His approach is historical. Brooks Atkinson is a prominent drama critic who published *Broadway Scrapbook* (1947). Atkinson traces the evolution of American drama through the different phases of American history. His approach is epistemological as he depicts the growth of various movements. Bermel, the great drama critic of *New York Times* (1973) discussed seriously about the characters who are misfits, sick and decadent because they are against themselves and against environment. The modern protagonists are too fragile to cope with the harsh and hostile environment. Burstein was a famous drama critic of *New York Times*. He published a collection of critical essays (1962) tracing the history of drama from Genet to Albee. He discussed the elements of "*The Theatre of Revolt*". He observes that modern drama thrives on the dark fury of Nietzsche. Ihab Hassan published the books *Radical Innocence* (1961) and *The Modern Self in Recoil* (1967) to resolve the issues of cruelty, violence and radicalism in the contemporary fiction and drama. In these books, Hassan theorizes a vision of the postmodern fiction and drama. He stresses that the main features of drama are discontinuity, cruelty, violence and radicalism. Madden's *American Dreams, American Nightmares* (1971) is another very significant collection of 19 important critical essays. David Madden traces various social, cultural and religious forces that result into the death of the American

Dream. Kahn traces the history of Absurd Theatre in drama; he gives a critical commentary on the vision of Tom Stoppard. The interesting thing about Stoppard is his experimentation in language.

No critic in the past and in the present has investigated the issue of corrosion of self of the protagonists of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber. Interestingly the British and American playwrights in the post World War period focus on the futility and meaninglessness of human existence and the gradual corrosion of self. The striking feature of the British and American plays is the conspicuous nature of the loss of self. In all the major plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter and Albee one finds the pervasive corrosion of self. The protagonists of Ionesco, Beckett, Pinter and Albee are seen struggling throughout the play.

Corrosion of self is a totally new perspective and its impact can be observed on all the playwrights. Ionesco, Beckett and Albee took the challenge and made drastic changes in the themes and plot structure of the plays. They were swept by the tide of the Theatre of Absurd. No wonder, modern British and American playwrights depicted the existential absurdity. After World War II the playwrights were confronted with the bewildering problem of the corrosion of self since reality became fluid. War and the Depression of 1930 had brought out skepticism in the world and the wave of antagonism spread everywhere. The Holocaust and the mass killings of the Jews in the concentration camps of Auschwitz led to the decadence of faith. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and the laws of Kepler brought out the concept of the machine-man. The contemporary playwrights were influenced by the image of the mechanical self. Sigmund Freud

was a German thinker; his explorations of the unconscious gave a new impetus to thinking. The philosophers projected new ideas and contended that man is but an infinitesimal fraction of the energy that flows through the universe. Freud and Einstein propagated the scientific and rational view of the evolution of man. Religion, rituals and traditions were scrapped. Man challenged the very existence of God as Nietzsche declared that "God is dead and we have buried him long ago." Joseph Wood Krutch discussed the growth of nihilism and the loss of identity of modern man.

Beckett, Albee and Tennessee Williams had witnessed the cruelty of society. They experienced a new wave of absurdity and pessimism gripping the psyche of people. The nihilistic ideas of Schopenhauer were freely propagated and it was feared that mankind was on the verge of total annihilation. Religious thinkers such as Ian Graeme Barbour and Emile Brunner reinterpreted the idealistic theories of religion and explored the dialectical relationship between science and religion. Man and his identity in the war-ridden world were reinterpreted and a new theological revolution started. The churches organized seminars and religious workshops to impart faith among people but the tide of nihilism and pessimism was very powerful. The corrosion of self had started and it became a reality. A new age started in which existence came to enjoy precedence over essence. Truth was an illusion. Mind and soul lost their transcendental appeal. Wordsworth and the Victorians had put faith in the divinity of Nature but in the post World War society Nature was dead. No religious illusions could sustain man. The Greeks and the Elizabethans believed that man is the creation of God as there are divine elements in his soul and mind. The modern philosophers contended that all these religious ideas

were illusive and meaningless. Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Karl Jaspers propounded the Existential philosophy and brought revolution in Art and literature. The Existentialists argued that failure is an inevitable fate of man. Nature is cruel to man and the forces of nature always work against the wishes of man. Sufferings in life are inescapable. Each project of man is doomed. In this situation action is futile and aspiration absurd. Albert Camus and Sartre propounded the theory of Existentialism as Sartre contended that "Existence precedes Essence" and he turned down the Platonic theory of ideas. He contended that there is no predefined pattern fixed for human beings and man is free to live his life. We live our lives, and that in turn defines what we truly are, not any idealized set of characteristics.

The trend towards the modern plays is to depict the gradual corrosion of self of the protagonists. The philosophical ideas of Sartre and Camus brought a revolution and the result was the evolution of The Theatre of the Absurd. The contemporary dramatists took inspiration from the theories of nihilism and made experiments in theatre. The evolution of the Absurd Plays brought new dramatic conventions and techniques in drama rejecting all the traditional forms of the Elizabethans and the Victorians. Shaw, O'Neill became outdated and a new wave in drama started. The Absurd plays brought drastic transformation in art and drama in England, France and America. In Science, corrosion means deterioration of material. The process of corrosion takes place in nature as corrosion is a perfectly natural process. All metals deteriorate with the passage of time. In the present study it is investigated that the corrosion of self also was a natural process. Modern man lost his integral self and the loss of self was depicted in the British and American drama. Ionesco, Genet, Beckett, Albee, Gelber and Tom Stoppard depicted the deterioration

of self in their plays. The wave of pessimism and nihilism got impetus by the Holocaust of the concentration camps of Auschwitz. The Nazis perpetrated unimaginable crimes on the millions of innocent Jews of Europe; gas chambers were set up to decimate the Jews. Primo Lewis, Elie Wiesel and Charlotte Delbo recorded that the small babies were tossed on the burning chimneys of Auschwitz. Elie Wiesel questioned the existence of God. The hero vanished as the loss of self is visible in the fiction of post World War II America. The novels of Scott Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer and Joseph Heller depicted the trapped and truncated protagonists - the victims of Catch-22 system. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night* depicted the nightmarish experiences of the American Dream. All values of human society collapsed and dollar became God in America. The prominent characteristic of the American novels that appeared during and after World War I is the depiction of the loss of stability and certainty of life and the emergence of dilemmas that grip the psyche of modern man. The American novelists turned to Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann and Kafka and imported the existential theories of Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Karl Jaspers in America. The World Wars created a wave of fear, terror and nihilism in America. The younger generation looked confused and baffled because of the nightmarish war situation.

Virginia Woolf and James Joyce concluded that the traditional Greek hero or Shakespearean hero has vanished. Victor Brombert traced the various stages of the evolution of the mythical hero but the traditional, "the conceptual hero" vanished and the absurd hero emerged. In all the works of the modern writers there is a constant corrosion of self. No wonder, the contemporary writers have no faith in the

potentiality of man. He finds himself alienated from the society lacking dignity and grandeur.

The history of drama after the Great War is quite interesting. The history of drama after the Victorian age depicts changes and revolutions in themes, techniques and language. The plays of 1920s depict man as a funny creature. He is a cog in a big machine. He has no identity and is portrayed as a cipher lost in the mundane world. The modern dramatists portrayed him as a sorry product of socio-economic forces. Man deteriorates into a soulless robot, corrupt and neurotic, groping in the dark alley. The expressionistic theatre depicted the trend towards the corrosion of self. The hero is anti-hero and his dehumanization became the major concern of the writers. The playwrights such as Maxwell Anderson, S.N Behrman, Clifford Odets, Robert Sherwood, Thornton Wilder and Eugene O'Neill depicted the wave of pessimism. Strindberg propagated the ideas of Surrealism; Freud experimented with the new theories of the Unconscious, Sexuality and Neurosis. Bergson too depicted the absurdity of human condition.

The evolution of anti-hero was a reality in contemporary literature and particularly in drama. The continental playwrights use new ideas and techniques to depict the dehumanization of the hero. War and the Great Depression changed the socio-political set-up of society. People became selfish, nihilistic and pessimistic. Life became meaningless for them and society became valueless, inhuman and un-heroic. Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) depicted Mr. Zero, the hero, as the waste product of post War society. He is dead in senses, cold in attitude and lost in spirits. The famous play, *The Hairy Ape* (1922) of O'Neill, depicted the corrosion of

self in his portrayal of Yank. He finds life meaningless and futile, people are callous towards him and his experiences are threatening. He struggles for his identity and finds no significance in his life. He is pained to discover that he is homeless and alienated in the world. He feels comfort in the deadly embrace of a real ape. O'Neill was a great experimenter in dramatic art. He used expressionistic techniques to explore the malaise and nausea of people and found that all conviction was transient. There was no absolute truth except the reality of death and despair. Meaninglessness of life haunted all his protagonists. Clifford Odets is another playwright of loss and frustration. He portrayed the theme of despair and depression in his play *Awake and Sing* (1935). Robert Sherwood brought gangsters as soulless characters in his dramas. His *The Petrified Forest* (1935) highlights the growing spiritual bankruptcy of people. Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) created sensation in the American drama by projecting characters as abstractions. Travis Bogard comments about the protagonists of Wilder thus: "They are docile creatures, incapable of heroism or villainy, passive shadows, theatrical stereotypes" (Bogard, *Modern Drama* 357).

In the post World War era the wave of nihilism gained momentum with the publication of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 1833. This gave rise to the corrosion of self. The pessimistic ideas of Schopenhauer further propagated the wave of pessimism bringing about the evolution of the corrosion of self in the protagonists. No wonder, the scene of theatre on the continent changed with the appearance of Ionesco, Genet, Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber. All the prominent dramatists gave birth to a new movement in drama which became famous as The Theatre of the Absurd. These

playwrights observed trends toward a gradual disintegration of self. The socio-economic forces completely bulldozed the individual who lost his identity in society. Nietzsche killed God in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1833). The absurd dramatists depict the horrifying alienation of man. David Riesman published his book *The Lonely Crowd* and contended that man has no identity, no existence; he is a lonely wanderer in the crowd of people. He is alone in the universe. He is bound to the wheel of destiny and he cannot escape the terror of the absurdity of life. Death is inevitable to him and all his struggles and achievements lead him to despair. His birth is superfluous on earth. He is a waste product of nature and is thrown in the cosmic dustbin after death. His real worth is the ashes preserved in an urn. Ihab Hassan further highlighted the real terror of absurdity. The protagonists of Beckett and Albee long for death as they attempt suicide to escape from the terror of the universe. Modern man is horrified by the mystical anarchy and organized nothingness prevalent in the universe. He is baffled with truth that is abstract and uncertain. No wonder, the continental modern theatre depicts the cries of man, the mood of nihilism and pessimism. Each modern play is a protest against life and its meaning. Kierkegaard published his thought provoking book *The Sickness unto Death* in 1946 and revolutionized art and philosophy by giving his philosophy of nihilism. He highlighted the growing anxiety neurosis of people. He seriously took up the issue of the traumatic nature of corrosion of self. He analyzed the nature of despair of man. He propagated the idea that life is meaningless. The real nature of his struggle of life is futile. It is this type of despair, "this sickness unto death" which disintegrates man's self and the consequences are neurosis and schizophrenia.

Religion has always acted as a unifying force; it has made human life meaningful. But today no religion helps man to know the purpose of life. There was no unifying principle left to give direction to human beings after the World Wars. The nihilistic ideas of man in post World War II era brought about the evolution of the Absurd drama. Man's conflict between society and the forces of Nature and religion results in his alienation, nausea and angst. Sophocles and Shakespeare depicted heroes who also suffered from isolation as they dared to revolt against fate and God. Hamlet found disorder in the world and he struggled to bring order out of chaos. He was also alone as all were against him - his mother, his uncle and all his friends and courtiers - but he never turned a neurotic misfit. His quest for identity led him to scrap the old customs and he found meaningful salvation and survival in a chaotic world. On the contrary, the quest of the modern protagonist is futile; he looks helpless and defeated. He suffers from the corrosion of self and is the victim of despair and intolerable anguish. Kierkegaard observes that he "cannot get rid of himself, cannot become nothing" (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* 110). The Existentialists took inspiration from the ideas of nihilism of Kierkegaard. Sartre presented the concept of broken and fragmented self in his *Being and Nothingness* (1943). He observes that the self of man is free to act but all his actions lead him to death and despair. Man is in fact trapped in a solitude from which there is no escape. Sartre has a very dismal and nihilistic view about man as he says: "Man is always separated from what he is by all the breadth of the being which he is not" (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 17). Life is very uncertain and the struggle is futile as defeat is always imminent. Human reality is a figment of imagination: "What is not

determines what is” (Sartre 87). Thus, self confronts its own negation and ultimately disintegrates.

Albert Camus came under the influence of Sartre and Kierkegaard when he wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). He was completely bewildered with the nature of universe and nature of man. He traced history and concluded that futility of life is the only certainty in this universe. Man is a helpless creature and his absurdity is a reality. No one can ignore this as he attacks the very existence of man. Man is always in conflict with truth and illusion, dreams and reality, he feels torn between infinities, between absolutes. Man is bound to the wheel of fire of sufferings and there is no escape for him. Human despair is rooted in his anxiety. Sartre wrote *Nausea* (1938), *Being and Nothingness* (1943), *No Exit* (1944) and *Existentialism is Humanism* (1946). In his *Nausea* Sartre observed that man must use his freedom to escape nausea. Death is inescapable and it is an event of absurdity. Albert Camus published *The Stranger* (1942), *The Fall* (1956) and *A Happy Death* (1972). He concluded that “there is one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide” (Camus, *The Fall* 6).

Camus defines “absurdity” as the “disproportion between man’s intention and the reality he will encounter” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 28). He borrows the myth of the tormented Sisyphus to prove his ideas about absurdity, despair and the endless anguish of man. Man is never at rest and at peace, he has been struggling since antiquity and he will never be sure of his success and happiness. Absurdity is a real human situation; it is a source of perpetual tension and anxiety. Man is always involved, always defeated and always a sufferer. Galloway depicted his idea of

absurdity in his own style. He is of the firm opinion that absurdity is an inescapable reality, there is no sense of achievement but only performance, his fate is he can struggle only and his fulfillment is “simply by defending a truth” (Galloway, *The Absurd Hero In American Drama* 12). It is an admitted fact that the evolution of the absurd hero is the product of his corrosion of self. This led to the evolution of anti-theatre too. In the avant-garde theatre of France, Arthur Adamov and Samuel Beckett depicted tramps and derelicts as heroes. They are completely dehumanized individuals - morally and spiritually. The hero is a dumb animal crying in wilderness in his futile quest for identity. He is tossed in the cosmic void to end his life in despair. Adamov's *Tous Contre Tous* (1999) depicts skeletal puppets, stripped bare of all dignity. Martin Esslin was perhaps the first drama critic who explored the theme of corrosion of self in absurd drama. Martin Esslin (1962) published his *The Theatre of the Absurd* in which he explored the main characteristics of absurd drama:

These plays give a bewildering experience; the plays are packed with a barrage of irrational ideas. The playwrights revolted against the traditional conventions of drama and evolved anti-theatrical techniques to dramatize the anxiety, alienation, and nihilism of the age. In all these plays, there is no heroism, no grandeur as some of which are labeled “anti-plays” (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 1).

The plays of Ionesco, Genet, Arthur Adamov and Samuel Beckett deal with the theme of the negation of all values. They put faith in the ideas of Sartre and Camus and revolted against the traditional techniques of drama. In the absurd drama of Ionesco and Genet, new images and symbols were effectively used depicting the

traumatic experiences of man and his absurdity. Language also deteriorated and got devalued. There is no action and no communication. The general effect is often a nightmare. The protagonist is confused and bewildered as he is too fragile and helpless to confront his environment. Eugène Ionesco and Jean Genet were the pioneers of “The Theatre of Absurd Movement”. Absurdity is the soul of the Theatre of the Absurd. Ionesco observed that absurd drama is about the theme of nothingness; the play has no purpose or objective. Martin Esslin contends that the Absurd is devoid of purpose or meaning of life. Esslin observes that in absurd drama “there is no heroism; the protagonist is lonely and rootless; he is totally uprooted from his religion. He is cut off from his metaphysical and transcendental roots” (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 20). Absurdity is the result of tension and anxiety of life. Ionesco realized that life is uncertain, everything in the world is uncertain and anxiety is inescapable. Man looks confused and bewildered all the time. He is defeated by the external forces. Ionesco defines absurdity thus: “Absurd is that which has no purpose, or goal, or objective” (Ionesco, *Antidotes* 4). Martin Esslin defines absurdity thus: “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. ... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots...” (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 20). Man’s alienation from society brings pain as he feels tormented. He loses interest in living because he finds life meaningless. Man lacks the inner strength to comprehend the mysteries of life and the world around him. He looks confused and bewildered. He is cut off from his roots and stands naked in the cruel and mysterious universe. He is alienated and his quest for life is futile. The tramps of Beckett struggle to question the universe around them. Everything becomes absurd for them, even their consciousness. The absurd hero of Beckett and Ionesco lost his identity; he is carried by the tide of events. This “absurd” hero cannot say

confidently: "I am myself". Ionesco depicted the Old Man as an absurd hero in *The Chairs* who says: "I am not myself. I am another. I am the one in the other" (Ionesco 145). The modern British and American playwrights revolt against the Greeks and the Elizabethans. Their ideals are Adamov, Beckett and Ionesco who dramatized the corrosion of self in their plays. In the Theatre of the Absurd new experiments were made in setting, plot and character. The conceptual hero vanished. Samuel Beckett, Tom Stoppard, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee and Jack Gelber depicted the corrosion of self of the protagonists. Each protagonist is bewildered, expressing his despair and the agony of the loss of self. Samuel Beckett had experienced the Holocaust and the cruelties of the Nazis. He had witnessed the brutal crimes of Hitler and the mass killing of the Jews in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. His faith in God was shaken. He doubted the existence of God. The wholesale massacre of the Jews made him restless. He wrote *Waiting for Godot* dealing with the theme of nihilism. The drama is a historical document of the turn of the events of the twentieth century. Ionesco observes that "modern man is lost in the world. His actions have become meaningless and senseless. They are absurd, and useless" (Ionesco, *Antidotes* 34).

No wonder, Ionesco, Genet and Adamov employ the techniques of anti-theatre. The plays were written under the influence of the surreal and grotesque techniques. No play of Ionesco, Beckett and Albee has a logical plot structure. Language is illogical and there is no communication. There is no plot and no solution of the situation. The dialogue is broken and the playwright freely uses the tools of pauses and dots. The language is broken and there is no action. Beckett's hero is alienated and uprooted from his society. He is homeless in his own world.

Sypher Wylie observes that, “Man cannot alienate himself from his own consciousness, a dilemma that brings on the present crisis in anti-literature and anti-art” (Wylie, *The Loss of Self* 17).

In the present study, the plays of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber are examined and analyzed from the perspective of the corrosion of self. The gradual deflation of self became an inevitable reality because the modern age was an age in which existence came to enjoy precedence over essence. Truth assumed a life-sustaining illusion. Mind, consciousness, soul are treated as illusive and meaningless things. For the existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Karl Jaspers, failure is the fate of man whose every project is doomed. In this situation action is futile and aspiration absurd. The existentialists thus gave eloquent expression to the current metaphysics of despair. A representative of the lost intellectual, the existentialist hero is introspective, subjective, and tormented by doubt. Being lost and fragmented, the neurotic protagonist, like the neurotic characters of Kafka’s novels, lives in a cosmos without direction, meaning or purpose.

Chapter 1

Brief Candle

The conspicuous characteristic of the plays of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber is the corrosion of self. After the two World Wars, there was destruction, depression and dissatisfaction everywhere and all this led to the emergence of a man who was more materialistic and less moral. This lack of morality and moral values is characterized by what is called Nihilism in literature. Arthur Schopenhauer published *The World as Will and Representation* (1844), *The Art of Being Right* (1831) and *On the Freedom of the Will* (1839) and propagated the ideas of nihilism in the world. Nihilism is a word that is derived from the Latin word 'nihil' meaning nothing. It is the philosophical position that values do not exist but rather are falsely invented. Most commonly, nihilism is presented in the form of existential nihilism which argues that life is without meaning, purpose or intrinsic value. Moral nihilists assert that morality does not exist, and subsequently there are no moral values with which to uphold a rule or to logically prefer one action over another. To a nihilist, all this is delusion. Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy. The philosophical ideas of Schopenhauer revolutionized art, literature and philosophy in the 20th century.

The contemporary playwrights such as Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber were greatly influenced by a general sense of

disillusionment as they couldn't find certainty, faith and objective truth believed by the Victorians. They broke away from the past and evolved the Theatre of the Absurd to articulate their new existential vision. Emergence of new psychological theories presented a new concept of human behaviour as a result of which man is no longer considered as self responsible or rational in his behaviour. Absurdism, one of the most exciting and creative movements in the modern theatre, is a term applied to a particular type of realistic drama which has absorbed theatre audience and critics for the past three decades. One specific area, appropriately labeled as the "Theatre of the Absurd" by the American critic Martin Esslin in his 1961 book of the same title, offers its audience an existentialist point of view of the outside world where there appears to be no true order or meaning. He defines absurd as something which is devoid of purpose. Man is cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots. He is lost and all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless. Inching ever closer to the presentation of the contemporary life, the evolution of absurdist drama from Samuel Beckett to Tom Stoppard brings a new focus to absurdism and expands the role of philosophy and metaphor in drama. The foundation of the concept of absurd can be traced back to Soren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth century Danish philosopher, who is also regarded the fore-father of existentialism. He describes the absurd as a situation in life, where all the rational and thinking abilities of a person are unable to tell him which course of action is to be adopted in life, but even in this uncertainty, he is forced to act or make a decision.

The Theatre of the Absurd is supposed to have originated in the avant-garde experiments of the 1920s and 1930s. However, the absurd elements can also be found in the wild humour and buffoonery of old comedy and in the plays of

Aristophanes, shortly after the rise of the Greek drama. Sometimes, the Morality plays of the Medieval Age are considered to be the precursors of the Theatre of the Absurd. The immediate forbearers of this theatre are the 19th century dramatists like Strindberg who progressed from photographic naturalism to more and more openly expressionist representations of dreams, nightmares or obsessions. These elements also found their way in the novels of Franz Kafka and James Joyce. However, the word 'absurd' was first used when Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi* was presented on December 10, 1896 at Lugne Roe's Theatre. It is said to be a play, unforgettable, nasty, devoid of all decorum and an outrage on society. The play is the acknowledged predecessor of the Theatre of the Absurd. *Ubu Roi* portrays a terrifying image of the animal nature of man and his cruelty. The audience stood aghast in utter bewilderment, not knowing what it was all about. They had not heard the like of it ever on a stage. Majority of the onlookers were dumbfounded at what they heard and seen. Martin Esslin avers rightly about the absurd plays, "These plays flout all the traditional and conventional notions of the plot" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 1).

Martin Esslin and Camus have discussed in detail the nature and meaning of absurdity of life. The atmosphere of the absurd plays is dreamlike, allegorical, symbolical and full of poetic images. The ancient tradition of fools and mad scenes in drama, of which Shakespeare provides a multitude of examples, are also a part of absurd literature. By the 1950s, in France, a group of playwrights wrote plays which the modern audience felt hard either to approve easily or reject conveniently. They placed the audience in a situation analogical to its own. Thus the drama of the 'absurd' is a type of experiment in theatre, which French masters experimented first and afterwards it took America in its stride. The American playwrights like Edward

Albee, Arthur Kopit and Jack Richardson who are also categorized as 'New Wave Playwrights' have shown their concern with the predicament of man in the universe, essentially as summarized by Albert Camus, in his essay *The Myth Of Sisyphus* (1942). The essay is a very serious study of the helplessness of man and the futility of human labour and attacks the very existence of man. Camus' Sisyphus is a typical absurd hero personifying the real quality of an absurd life; he is absurd through his passion and suffering and through his eternal work that can never be finished:

The Gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 88).

The audience sees the great effort in Sisyphus, recurring again and again as Sisyphus tries to move the boulder and push it up the hill thousands of times. Finally, at the end of his long, exhausting effort, he reaches his aim. However, at the same moment, he sees the boulder rolling down back to the lower world from where it will have to be lifted again and so he returns back to the bottom. Camus refers to the predicament of endless suffering of Sisyphus:

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step towards the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour...is the hour of consciousness (Camus 89).

These moments of consciousness open up the world of the absurdity. The world of never-ending effort goes on eternally. There is no escape possible from this world which is characterized by the world of estrangement, loneliness, waiting and continual endurance. The characters are helpless at the hands of cruel fate. They sit passively waiting earnestly for a change in their circumstances. Kierkegaard in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) considered rendering belief in God or in any other religious authority as absurd. Hence, there exists an absurdity which cannot be eliminated. Camus believed in the first scenario: a life intrinsically devoid of meaning and purpose. He refuses to accept any meaning that is beyond this existence. He avers in this context:

I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know the meaning ...What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 5).

Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* is a bleak absurdist exploration of the travails of two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon. They are stranded in a deserted place where they endlessly wait for Godot to appear. It is a play where nothing happens.

Vladimir: "That passed the time."

Estragon: "It would have passed anyway" (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 35).

The same void and nothingness exists in Beckett's *Endgame* too.

Hamm: "What time is it?"

Clov: "The same as usual" (Beckett, *Endgame* 34).

Death and meaninglessness appear to be at the basis of the philosophy of absurd. The 'absurd' is a philosophical vision of cosmic, social and psychological disorder. Camus next puts a question: What is the point of living on if life is absurd? Why shouldn't we commit suicide and hasten our fate? In his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he attempts to answer this question and presents an alternative to suicide. How to live with the consciousness of this absurdity of life is the central question of Camus' philosophy. He puts a question, "Does the absurd dictate death?" (Camus 16).

Nihilism is another powerful factor that led to the growth of the drama of absurd. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1833) made the revolutionary statement that "God is dead, buried Him long long ago!" (Nietzsche 2). He propagated skepticism, doubt and despair. There was no unifying principle left to give direction to human beings. Nietzsche asserts that with the decline of Christianity and the rise of physiological decadence, nihilism is in fact characteristic of the modern age, though he implies that the rise of nihilism is still incomplete and that it has yet to be overcome. One of the primary differences between nihilism and both absurdism and existentialism lies in the notion of meaning. All hold there is "none imposed on you from the outside or that can be discovered from a search. Only Nihilism holds, however, that you cannot manufacture some kind of meaning if you wish. (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 43). The thinkers of avant-garde drama recognize that people make their own purpose in life; they just question the value of doing so. It may seem really important to Sisyphus to push that rock up the hill but everyone on the outside can see how pointless it is. Similarly, there are some values that the absurdists tend to hold whereas the nihilists technically reject all values.

Absurdist often appreciate beauty, complexity and life itself; they often devalue reason, ethics, and systematic processes. Life can be joyful as long as you just lie back, appreciate the scenery, and don't get too hung up on where and when it is going to end.

Absurdity is a key word in Beckett's dramatic writings as well as of the whole Theatre of the Absurd. Martin Esslin refers to Ionesco's concept of absurdity: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. ...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 20). Absurdity does not reside in the world itself, or in a human being, but in a tension which is produced by their mutual indifference. Human existence is in its essence completely different from the existence of things outside the human subject. The world of things is impenetrable and because of its impenetrability it is also alien to man. Man stands opposite to the world of things, which permanently makes an attack on him. Absurdity appears in the moments when man realizes his situation, in the moments of awareness of his position in the world. Camus describes this situation of realization and understanding in these words:

Thursday, Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm-this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. ...Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 35).

In other words, absurdity arises from moments when all the facts of life that flow mechanically stop, and when consciousness starts to wake up and move. This means that the nonsense of life has been opening in the only one incomprehensible feeling. “Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined” (Camus 45). Being alienated, the protagonist of the anti-theatre begins to question himself as well as the universe around him; everything becomes absurd and problematical, even the phenomenon of consciousness. Having lost his identity, he is swept along by the tide of events. This “absurd” hero bears the knowledge of his own insignificance in the cosmic scheme of things. He cannot say confidently: “I am myself”. Instead, he says like the Old Man in *The Chairs*, “I am not myself. I am another. I am the one in the other” (Ionesco, *The Chairs* 145). Man finds himself baffled by his non-existence and struggles to understand who he is and what is his purpose in life.

When the plays of Ionesco, Beckett, Genet and Adamov first appeared on the stage, the audience underwent a unique and completely new kind of experience. These plays puzzled and outraged the critics as well as the audience. These plays flouted all the standards by which drama has been judged by many centuries and provoked the audience who came to the theatre expecting a well-made play which is supposed to present well-observed characters. On the other hand, these plays presented hardly any recognizable human beings with their witty dialogues, rather the dialogues, here, seem to have degenerated into meaningless babble. As described by Esslin, “Characters are frequently stereotypical, archetypal, or flat character types as in *Commedia dell’arte*. The more complex characters are in crisis because the world around them is incomprehensible” (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 402). The characters in Absurdist drama are lost and floating in an incomprehensible

universe and they abandon rational devices and discursive thought because these approaches are inadequate. A well-made traditional play has a beginning, middle and a neatly tied-up ending but the absurd plays start and end arbitrarily. Martin Esslin states that, “By all the traditional standards of critical appreciation of drama, these plays are not only abominably bad; they don’t even deserve the name drama” (Esslin 1).

In the avant-garde theatre, setting, plot, character and form have totally vanished and there is no heroism, nothing to admire, not even much illusion. No wonder, Leonard Pronko sees in Beckett’s *Endgame* a picture of the “disintegration of a human universe” (Pronko, *Avant-Garde* 30). Horace Gregory compares Beckett’s characters to ancient Roman Gladiators because they live outside the conventions of society. Indeed Beckett’s world is “populated by tramps that just play out their moves in the endless, aimless game of life with robot like submissiveness” (Pronko, *Avant-Garde* 88). Ionesco wrote without any specific point of view because, for him, all points of view are useless. Life is projected as hell in which each person is imprisoned in his own private cubicle, invisible and inaudible to others. The so-called communication being nonsense, the world of Ionesco is populated with weak, helpless and artless lost souls who “cannot defend themselves either against machinations of bourgeoisie society...or against the demands of their spouses...or at least of all against their own natures” (Wulbern, *Commitment in Context* 143). Genet’s characters live in the world of illusion and when all the layers of illusions are stripped off, the cycle of the corrosion of self is complete. They do not exist at all. Living in the world of illusion, they have no selves, except as illusions, they are not even protagonists, for they do nothing. In fact, the avant-garde

theatre of France demolished the very concept of hero. Influenced by it, Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber depicted the corrosion of self in their plays. Man inhabits a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning is indecipherable and his place within it is without purpose. He is bewildered, troubled and obscurely threatened expressing his metaphysical despair because of his corrosion of self. Samuel Beckett had seen the brutal crimes of Hitler and he was shocked to witness the holocaust of concentration camps. His faith in God was shaken and he started questioning where God is because the wholesale massacre of the Jews disturbed his mind. His *Waiting for Godot* is an epoch-making drama articulating the mood of nihilism. The play best expresses the turn of the events of the twentieth century as the protagonists struggle to escape from self because they are too fragile to cope with their existential realities. In the words of Ionesco “man is lost in the world; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless” (Ionesco, *Antidotes* 34).

Corrosion of self is a psychosocial state or condition of disorientation and confusion in the life of man, resulting from conflicting internal and external experiences, pressures, and expectations that often produce acute anxiety. It is a disorientation concerning one's sense of self, values and role in society. Beckett's characters are wandering in the bleak landscape of our post-traumatic world, homeless on a planet where nothing grows, refugees in trash bins, cripples crisscrossing fields in search of a consolation that never arrives. There they are, barely able to speak, trying to articulate the approaching void. So the characters are depicted as such victims that they dare not even laugh. The protagonist of Albee merely waits to be “physically or psychologically emasculated, invites his doom

with a self-immolation passivity that masochistically converts pain into pleasure” (Henry Hewes, *Who’s Afraid of Big Bad Broadway?* 60). Just have a look at the following dialogue:

Vladimir: “One daren’t even laugh any more.”

Estragon: “Dreadful privation.”

Vladimir: “Merely smiles.” [He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.] “It’s not the same thing. Nothing to be done” (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 25).

Lucky of Beckett describes his traumatic experiences because of his corrosion of self in *Waiting For Godot*: “... that man in brief inspite of the strides of alimentation and defecation is seen to waste and pine, waste and pine...and for the reasons unknown continue to shrink and dwindle ...” (Beckett 36). Beckett’s characters certainly waste and pine. Their body is no better than a waste product destined for the disposal heap. Lucky’s speech terrifies the hearers because it foretells the extinction of man from the world. He exposes through his speech that in spite of the researches of science, the intuition of the artist, the endurance of the earth, everything is condemned to waste into the great dark of nothing. In *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, Beckett has created a world in which Godot never comes. The protagonists can only wait, they are buried up to the neck in sand or face down in the mud, a world which is devastated, post-atomic and so empty that even a solitary human being seems like a monstrous intrusion. Beckett himself summed up his attitude in 1949 when he said that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. The corrosion of self leads to neurosis, depression and negation of life. Vladimir and Estragon live in a void:

Estragon: “What exactly did we ask him for?”

Vladimir: “Were you not there?”

Estragon: “I can’t have been listening.”

Vladimir: “Oh...nothing very definite” (Beckett, *Godot* 10).

Through Ham too Beckett depicts the corrosion of self of modern man in his play *Endgame* when he says:

“...One day you’ll be blind, like me. You’ll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me.”

Clov is just passive and says: ... “It’s not certain...”

Hamm: “Well, you’ll lie down then, what the hell! Or you’ll come to a standstill, simply stop and stand still, the way you are now. One day you’ll say, I’m tired, I’ll stop. What does the attitude matter?”
(Beckett, *Endgame* 109-110).

Thus, the protagonists of Beckett suffer the gradual corrosion of self, they are expelled from the stream of successive life events which create the illusion of flux of time, and stop in one single moment which opens up the static, unceasing, absurd world of absurdity. The audience feels a sense of pity and belongingness with the two homeless wanderers, who when fed up with their endless waiting, contemplate committing suicide:

Vladimir: “What do we do now?”

Estragon: “Wait.”

Vladimir: “Yes, but while waiting.”

Estragon: “What about hanging ourselves?” (Beckett, *Godot* 9).

In their struggle to escape from self, both Estragon and Vladimir become the victims of schizophrenic tendencies. It is a psychotic disorder or a group of disorders marked by severely impaired thinking, emotions and behaviour. Generally, Vladimir and Estragon lose their ability to take care of personal needs and grooming. There is a disconnection between their thoughts and actions which further causes loss of personality, agitation, unusual behaviour and loss of touch with reality. The characters are shown to be suffering from delusions, hallucinations, disorganized and incoherent speech and several emotional abnormalities which are the implications of their corrosion of self. Beckett through the Theatre of the Absurd highlighted man's fundamental bewilderment and confusion, stemming from the fact that man has no answers to the basic existential questions: "Why we are alive, why we have to die, why there is injustice and suffering?"

Not only men, even women suffer from the corrosion of self. All the heroines of Tennessee Williams are neurotic and borderline individuals as they suffer from the corrosion of self. Tennessee depicted the psychological neurosis of his protagonists in his plays *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1959) and *The Night of Iguana* (1962). His women protagonists struggle desperately to end alienation through physical contact and this leads them to promiscuity, sexual aberration and homosexuality. Freud classified homosexuality as an "illness" rooted in the experiences of childhood. Kaplan treats homosexuality "as a perverse situation to anxieties about identification" (Kaplan, *Companion to American Drama* 2). The theatre of Tennessee Williams is erotic, sensational and lurid as the dramatist depicts the corrosion of self of his protagonists who indulge in perversion to end alienation and often become the victims of moral

and psychological pressures. John Gassner called Tennessee the dramatist of frustration because he had “captured with such skill the truncated lives of his characters caught in a world of their own illusions unable to break out” (Gassner, *The Theatre in our Times* 1). Since all his heroines suffer from the corrosion of self, they withdraw into their own fantasies and seek artificial ecstasy in illusions to conceal their guilt. Crushed under the heavy burden of metaphysical guilt, they suffer total deflation of self and experience anxiety, depression and despair. Sensitive and vulnerable, weak and fragile, Amanda, Laura, Maggie and Blanche easily become prey to internal and external forces. According to Carl Jung, neurosis is essentially a matter of schism between the individual’s conscious and unconscious desires - “a dissociation of personality due to the existence of complexes” (Jung, *The Theory of Psychoanalysis* 188). Adler contends that “every neurosis can be understood as an attempt to free oneself from a feeling of inferiority in order to gain a feeling of superiority” (Adler, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* 23). Neo-Freudians like Eric Fromm and Karen Horney have emphasized “anxiety”, “adult experience”, cultural influence on the individual as the dominant factors of neurosis. All the psychiatrists, Freudians and Non-Freudians observe that neurosis is “a sickness in a personality; it seriously debilitates one’s mind and leads to erosion of one’s individuality” (Adler 4).

Tennessee Williams uses the concrete and fluid images of chaos and disorder to depict the inner turbulent world of his characters. The image of the “bits of a shattered rainbow” and the broken glass menagerie are very effective in the play *The Glass Menagerie*. Laura talks of the cities that are like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn away from the branches. Tom also refers to the images of night and darkness to articulate his sense of pessimism and nihilism:

“Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of coloured glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colours, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 237).

Tennessee Williams is regarded as the dramatist of frustration because he had “captured with such skill the truncated lives of his characters caught in a world of their illusions unable to break out” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 1). Williams concentrates on the neurotic and irrational elements of his protagonists because majority of them are borderline personalities clinging to illusions and fantasies. He uses the devices of decadent memory, insanity, intoxication, dream and death to highlight the broken and shattered self of the women protagonists.

In the present study, the main focus is on the corrosion of self of the protagonists of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber. These playwrights flouted all the traditional dramatic techniques and literary devices and evolved their own anti-theatrical techniques such as monologues, ambiguous dialogues, pauses, repetitions and broken conversation. They used conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which is distorts, parodies and break

downs. By ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically.

There is no action in the drama and the protagonists are tramps and crippled revealing the absurdities and anxieties of life. Some common characteristics of absurdist plays include the negation of all values, the articulation of existential philosophy, a rejection of narrative continuity and the rigidity of logic, as well as a radical devaluation of language which is seen as a futile attempt to communicate the impossible. Language had become a vehicle of conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The general effect is often a nightmare or dreamlike atmosphere in which the protagonist is overwhelmed by the chaotic or irrational nature of his environment. Esslin identified Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco, and Jean Genet as the leaders of the avant-garde movement. The protagonists in the Absurdist drama experience corrosion of self. They are the victims of psychological ailments such as depression, nausea, neurosis and schizophrenia. They are too fragile to confront the absurdities of life and get distracted. They suffer corrosion of self and look sick and decadent. The main reason behind the popularity of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber was the totally new kind of experience dramatized on the stage. Every new kind of experience and everything that breaks itself from so called traditions is sure to cause a fascination and stir among the audience that always want something different and new each time when they visit the theatre. The creators of

this kind of drama are called absurdist playwrights; they have used different artistic means to convey what is supposed humanity.

If the critical touchstones of conventional drama did not apply to these plays, this must surely have been due to a difference in objective, the use of different artistic means, to the fact, in short, that these plays were both creating and applying a different convention of drama (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 10).

The corrosion of self led to the emergence of the absurd hero after World War II. It was a significant stage in the evolution of anti-theatre too. In the avant-garde theatre of France, Arthur Adamov, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet dehumanized the individual completely. His corrosion of self turned him into a dumb animal bellowing back and forth across a crowded space that seems to him a void. Adamov's best play, *Tous Contre Tous* (1999) deals with the social persecution of a group of people within the society, "the characters are skeletal puppets, stripped bare of all dignity and feeling - obsessed only by their desire to survive at any cost." (Wellworth, *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox* 28) The absurd plays depict an unfamiliar kind of atmosphere. The situations depicted and portrayed are unrealistic and dream-like. They don't dramatize the experiences related to day-to-day life of the audience. They take the audience to the world away from their own and where the characters are seen residing in a world created by themselves. The labeling of the different plays under the title the Theatre of the Absurd is not such an easy task. A label of this kind therefore is an aid to understanding, valid only in so far as it helps to gain insight into a work of art. One cannot classify any play under one label only. Any play may contain some elements

that can best be understood in the light of the label under which it is classified while it may also contain some other elements that can be best understood in the light of different conventions. As is averred by Martin Esslin, “It is not a binding classification; it is certainly not all-embracing or exclusive” (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 2).

The evolution of the Absurd Theatre resulted into the gradual corrosion of self in the protagonists. From Greeks to Shakespeare and from Shakespeare to Brecht, dramatists portrayed life-like characters and thus what happens to Oedipus and Lear is partly the result of what they are. In epics, the problem of man is linked with the destiny of the nation, for instance, the fate of Oedipus is linked with the destiny of Athens; he himself is a presence making history. Action and limits, violence and organization, the individual and collective norms - these are the polarities that the epic hero has to experience. On the level of ritualistic pattern, his experience culminates in rebirth. He passes from guilt through suffering to purgation and emerges “a new man”. But in the modern drama, the myth of rebirth, renewal, and rededication has degenerated into a grotesque parody of their classical versions. The heroes of the quest are tattered and fallen beings suffering from eternal disillusionment and frustration. But an absurdist “gives nothing we can envy or admire; no courage, no gallantry, no glamorous lovers, beautiful costumes, handsome settings or desirable furniture” (Hayman, *Theatre and Anti-Theatre* 4).

In the present study the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and post-Freudian thinkers have been relied to investigate the causes and symptoms of corrosion of self of the protagonists of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber. Sigmund Freud discusses the theory of displacement of self in *Interpretation*

of *Dreams* (1899). Michael Lacan's *Mirror Stage* (1949) examined psychic pressures and tensions resulting into neurosis. Eric Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941) explored the suppression of individual freedom leading to degeneration of sensibility. R.D. Laing wrote *The Divided Self* (1913) giving an account of a schizoid personality and symptoms of schizophrenia. Dr. Karen Horney focused on human psychology and explored the causes of neurosis in *Our Inner Conflicts* (1966). Ihab Hassan's *In Quest of Nothing: Selected Essays, 1998-2008* and *Radical Innocence* discusses the growth of trauma and the impact of fractured identities on the mind and sensibility of the individuals. Cathy Caruth published *Unexplained Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) and in this book she explored all the causes and symptoms of trauma. The protagonists of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber experience trauma in their life in one way or the other and a detailed investigation of their abnormal behaviour and attitude is depicted in this study.

Objectives of The Proposed Research

Precisely, the present study has the following objectives:

- 1) To trace the causes of the gradual evolution of corrosion of self of the protagonists of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber.
- 2) To examine and investigate the causes of the growth of *The Theatre of the Absurd*, *The Theatre of Cruelty* of Antonin Artaud, the evolution of the anti-theatrical devices employed by Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber.

- 3) To depict the broken, disintegrated universe of Tennessee Williams in the light of the drama of *Corrosion of Self*.
- 4) To investigate the theories of Freud, Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, Dr. Karen Horney, Erich Fromm and R.D. Laing to comprehend human absurdity and the nature of the despair of the protagonists of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber.
- 5) To depict the interior landscape of the protagonists of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber who are victims of false delusions and fantasies.

Review of Literature of Past and Present

Aloni published his thought provoking book *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche's Healing and Edifying Philosophy* in 1991 giving a detailed analysis of the nihilistic philosophy. He is of the opinion that nihilism had a great impact on modern art and philosophy. People witnessed many human brutalities during the World Wars. The cruelties of the Nazis perpetrated on the Jews in the concentration camps propagated the wave of nihilism. Antonin Artaud was greatly influenced by the nihilism of Arthur Schopenhauer and Fredrick Nietzsche when he published *The Theatre and its Double: Collected Works* (1974). Loss of faith always haunted Artaud and he dismisses the idea of a religious theatre. He believed that people are left with no hopes. Artaud gives revolutionary ideas about the Theatre of Cruelty. He strongly advocated for changes in society. He realized that civilization and culture demand new experiments. Theatre demands a new medium and a new language. Artaud advocated new themes and new imagery and symbols to articulate the anxiety and despair of modern man. Artaud justifies the emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd.

The approach of Eric Bentley is historical. His book *In Search of Theatre* (1953) traces the history of American Drama from Ibsen to the modern times. He discusses all the movements of theatre and experiments made by the playwrights from time to time. He contends that Calderon, Strindberg, Schiller and Pirandello were great pioneers in drama. Bentley analyzes the dilemmas and uncertainties of the protagonists of Ionesco, Genet and Adamov. He refers to the turbulent period of drama. Bentley describes the evolution of the Theatre of the Absurd by Beckett and Ionesco. He traces all the events which made the drama violent and aggressive. The approach of Brooks Atkinson is also historical as he investigated the various trends of the contemporary American theatre and published *Broadway Scrapbook* (1947). The book traces the evolution of American drama through the different phases of American history. His approach is epistemological as he depicts the growth of various movements. Atkinson was a famous drama critic of Broadway. He published famous articles on drama and discussed the trends and techniques of modern drama. From expressionism to the growth of the Theatre of the Absurd, all changes have been recorded in the Scrapbook. He is of the firm view that with the growth of drama, there is a consistent devaluation of the personality of the characters. It is pertinent to note that Brooks does not give us a detailed analysis of the problem of the corrosion of self, his approach is historical.

Bermel, in *Contradictory Characters: An Interpretation of the Modern Theatre* (1973), has discussed the characters who are misfits, sick and decadent because they are against themselves and against environment. The modern protagonists are too fragile to cope with the harsh and hostile environment. They are seen fighting against themselves. They are victims of their inner depressions. They

have no faith as no idealism can save them from the nightmarish situation. They are contradictory, sick and decadent, devoid of any heroism. Bermel's study is primarily character analysis as he does not give an investigation of the systems. He discusses the causes and the stages of the decadence of characters. Burstein was a famous drama critic of *New York Times*. He published a collection of *Critical Essays (1962)* tracing the history of drama from Genet to Albee. He discussed the elements of "*The Theatre of Revolt*". He observes that modern drama thrives on the dark fury of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's arrogant "I Will" was a desperate response to the absurd universe. He rejected God, Church, Community and family. Man is alone in the universe and this loneliness makes him sick and decadent. In *Escape from Freedom (1941)*, Fromm observes that man has consciousness of sense, flesh and blood. He knows himself to be substantial. Freud took a different approach in *Civilization and its Discontents (1915)*. He investigated the causes of man's frustration and depression. The individual begins his journey with ego. An individual experiences his self as being detached from his body. The study of Freud is fundamentally psychological and discussion of the various symptoms in general.

Karen Horney reinterpreted all the psychoanalytical theories of Freud from a fresh perspective. She published *Neurotic Personality of Our Time (1937)* and made many changes in the theories of Freudians. In this critical study, Horney first introduced the term "character neurosis" to discuss the deformation of personality. She contended that anxiety is the root cause of the deflation of self. Discussing treatment in *New Ways in Psychoanalysis (1939)*, Horney uses a new term, "character structure" and analyzes trends within the character structure. She brought to psychoanalysis a new understanding of the importance of culture and environment. Irving Soloman (2006) discusses the theories of Karen Horney. He

explored the difference between the attitudes of “moving forward”, “moving against” and “moving away” from people. Horney does not regard neurosis as rooted in instinct. Her theory is constructive and innovative. These theories are important to know the growth of neurosis in a character. These psychoanalytical theories have been applied in this study to explore the various stages of the corrosion of self. Ihab Hassan published the books *Radical Innocence* (1961) and *The Modern Self in Recoil* (1967) to resolve the issues of cruelty, violence and radicalism in the contemporary fiction and drama. In these books, Hassan theorizes a vision of the postmodern fiction and drama. He stresses that the main features of drama are discontinuity, cruelty, violence and radicalism. The subversion of forms is the main tool of his theories. He believes that silence creates void in the life of a protagonist. The sufferings of the modern protagonist are multiplied; he suffers from the torments of madness, ecstasy and mystic trance. He relies on the Orpheus myth. He speaks of silence and man’s absurd situation. Genet and Beckett depicted this spiritual malaise in dramas. Hassan does not talk about the corrosion of self of the protagonists of Beckett and Albee. Madden’s *American Dreams, American Nightmares* (1971) is another very significant collection of 19 important critical essays. David Madden traces various social, cultural and religious forces that result in the death of the American Dream. All the critical essays provide a comprehensive view of American literature, past and present. There is no critical essay discussing the issue of corrosion of self. Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard, and Jack Gelber brought a revolution in theatre. Laing’s *The Divided Self* (1965) discusses the symptoms of schizoid and schizophrenic in a personality. The main focus of Dr. Laing is to investigate the psychic forces and pressures which deflate the self of an individual. Pressures make him a neurotic person. The book

contains further theoretical development on the idea of self and 'false self system'. He has given illustrations from Kafka and Kierkegaard. *The Sickness Unto Death* (1946) of Kierkegaard brought revolution in Western art, religion and philosophy. Heidegger, Kafka, Barth, Sartre and Camus took inspiration from Kierkegaard's ideas. His teachings brought about the wave of pessimism and skepticism. Beckett and Albee depicted the themes of death, angst and despair in their plays. Modern protagonists are directionless and hence suffer neurosis.

The Theatre of the Absurd and its evolution forms an interesting shift from traditional drama. No wonder, the corrosion of self became a reality in the contemporary British and American drama. Many books and research papers were published to depict the various stages of the deflation of self but no full length study is available examining and investigating the various stages of the corrosion of self of the protagonists. Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays* (1961) deals with the fundamental conflict between sense and mind. What we want from the universe is different from what we find in the universe. Amacher published *Edward Albee* in 1969. The book is a collection of critical essays. Albee's *The Zoo Story* was staged in 1958. The plot of the play reflects the cultural scene of the 1950s. Albee has highlighted the crisis of American culture. He narrates the story of modern man when all ideals collapsed. Man suffered isolation and depression. He exposes the sordid and absurd life of man through the bizarre dialogue of Jerry with Peter. He is forced to enter the world of animals. He has not discussed the causes of the corrosion of self of Jerry. Kahn traces the history of absurd in drama; he gives a critical commentary on the vision of Tom Stoppard. The interesting thing about Stoppard is his experimentation in language. His style is lyrical and symbolical. He

discusses the absurd language of Beckett and Ionesco. The learned critic observes that the contemporary playwrights go beyond absurdity. Modern man cannot comprehend the metaphysical despair. There is no concrete reality and no idealism. Man is destined like Sisyphus to suffer alone and die alone. Ruby Cohn published *A Beckett Canon* in 2007. She examined the variety of genres in which Beckett worked including novels, poems and drama. Cohn investigated that in the plays of Beckett plot, character and denouement are conspicuously absent. In fact, there is no structural beginning and end at all. She records that in the plays of Beckett there is no plot, no character, no denouement; no beginning, no middle, no end and no character. Beckett came in France and made many experiments. There is total disintegration of art and culture. Ruby discusses the themes and techniques of Beckett. There is reference to the psychic volcano of his protagonists. Martin Esslin cleared all confusion about the Theatre of the Absurd in his analysis in *The Absurd Drama* (1965). This book was a landmark in the history of Absurd Drama. He talks about the different conventions, language, stylistic techniques of anti-theatre. Esslin explores the different techniques of Beckett. Adamov Ann Paolucci made significant contribution to the history of drama critics and gives a serious analysis of the plays of Edward Albee. He used diverse dramatic forms as naturalism, surrealism, symbolism. Albee earned the reputation of the dramatist of the sick neurotic people like Jerry, Martha and George. Madam Ann does not describe the growth of the absurd protagonists in America. Pronko's *Avant-Garde: Experimental Theatre in France* (1962) discusses the nature of avant-garde theatre which revolted against the traditional theatre. Beckett's theatre is remarkable for dehumanizing characters and excessive pessimism. His main tools are diffuseness of plot and verbal aridity.

Language is obscure and lyrical. There is a breakdown of communication. He deals with the themes of metaphysical despair and anguish. The Nihilism depicted in *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* reveals man's absurd condition. Indeed he is thrown in a wide world to suffer alone. Pronko too does not take up the issue of the corrosion of self of the protagonists of Beckett. Riddel in his *A Streetcar Named Desire: Nietzsche Descending* (1963) gives a critical analysis of the women protagonists of Tennessee Williams. He discusses the broken and fragile nature of women. Indeed they are too vulnerable to cope with the harsh existential realities of life. In this study, he explores the schizoid personality of Blanche of *Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche's outburst is the loss of "Belle Reve, the home place, the plantation" (Williams, *A Streetcar named Desire* 249). Blanche has had these losses, too, although much earlier in life. Blanche lives in the world of darkness and gloom. Her life is a tragic tale of losses such as disillusion in marriage, loss of the plantation, an irregular life leading to loss of beauty. Even the name Belle Rêve suggests that everything is only a dream. In the play, Williams depicts Blanche's past as Blanche says to Stella:

"How in hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for? Death is expensive, Miss Stella! (...) Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep! ... Stella, Belle Rêve was his headquarters! Honey — that's how it slipped through my fingers!" (127).

Blanche becomes hysterical as she blames the loss of plantation at the expense of "all that sickness and dying." In this study too there is no reference to the

corrosion of self of Blanche. Maria Stenz observes that Albee has been called a defeatist and a pessimist. He is the poet of loss and a pessimist. His purpose in his plays is to shock and to disturb the audience. His women are sick and morbid. He described his work as stylized naturalism; all the characters of Albee are highly individualized and psychologically motivated. In the much discussed book *Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss*, Maria nowhere talks about the mental state of the protagonists of Albee. Wylie Sypher's *Loss of Self in Modern Literature and Art* (1962) depicts the causes and the symptoms of the loss of self in a character due to his fragile nature and temperament. He argued that the main cause of the deflation of self of a protagonist is the materialistic growth of culture and civilization. Mental pain and anguish result into the loss of self. It leads to self-disintegration. The process begins with a traumatic event which causes the weakening of the ego and its defenses. He talks about the integrative forces of the ego that bring disintegration in a character. He analyzes the nature of the protagonists of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber. John Fleming further explored the characteristics of the Absurd drama. He talks about death and meaninglessness as the basis of the philosophy of the Absurd. The 'absurd' is a vision of cosmic, social and psychological disorder. Absurdity means living in a universe where life is meaningless. Fleming talks about the potential of man who can bring drastic changes in society. But the "absurd theatre aims to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 123). The protagonist is anti-hero; he is confused and bewildered.

Gap in the Past and Present Research: Evolution of Anti-theatrical Conventions of Drama

A plethora of books of criticism and research papers were published on the themes and characters of the British and American playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber but there is no full length analytical work investigating the issue of corrosion of self in all the protagonists. The present study focuses on the evolution of the anti-theatrical conventions. Beckett, Albee, Williams, Stoppard and Gelber discarded all the conventional techniques used by Shakespeare. The vision of the contemporary playwrights was transcendental. They used anti-theatrical techniques and devices to depict the stages of the corrosion of self of the protagonists. Hence, the absurd drama is unconventional. The playwrights seriously attempted to articulate the anxieties and traumas of the people. The plays of Beckett and Ionesco don't depict logical situations. There is no conventional characterization. The situations are not described coherently. Beckett's protagonists are helpless creatures; trapped and anti-heroes. Beckett is famous in the world for *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Krapp's Last Tape*. Beckett discusses sight versus blindness and body and soul. He also depicts the various levels of time and their connectedness. Man doesn't want to wait, still he has to wait. He doesn't want to go yet he has no choice but to continue the journey of life. Vladimir and Estragon, or Didi and Gogo, Hamm and Clov, Pozzo and Lucky, Nagg and Nell are typical modern anti-heroes. They are a puzzle for the audience. Beckett is an unconventional dramatist who evolved new theatrical devices to portray characters suffering from the corrosion of self. His vision of life is nihilistic and pessimistic. The characters are confused and bewildered and are seen

waiting for Godot who never comes. There is a strange juxtaposition of illusion and reality. They don't know why they are waiting. "Will Godot bring salvation? or Death?"(Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 123). It is pertinent to mention at the outset of the present thesis that the theories of avant-garde theatre will be applied to investigate the symptoms and environment of corrosion of self. Since most of the protagonists of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber are sick and decadent, Freudian and post Freudian theories are applied to analyze their oddities, whims and neurotic passions. In the following chapters the study has explored the various causes and the symptoms of corrosion of self found in the protagonists of Beckett, Albee, Tennessee Williams, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber.

Chapterization

Chapter 1 : Brief Candle

Chapter 2 : The Anti-Theatrical Devices to Dramatize the Corrosion of Self in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*

Chapter 3 : Stages of Gradual Corrosion of Self of Beckett's Protagonists: A Case Study of Lucky

Chapter 4 : The Broken, Disintegrated Universe of Tennessee Williams: Drama of Corrosion of Self

Chapter 5 : Albee and The Theatre of Loss: Suicide as a Tool for Survival for Jerry in *The Zoo Story*

Chapter 6 : Psychoanalytical Analysis of George-Martha Relationship: Neurotic Games of Fun and Corrosion of Self in *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?*

Chapter 7 : Pirandellian Theatre of Sanity and Insanity: Corrosion of Self in

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Chapter 8 : The Junkies and Neurotics of Jack Gelber: Disintegration of Self

in *The Connection*

Conclusion

Bibliography

Chapter 2

The Anti-Theatrical Devices to Dramatize the Corrosion of Self in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*

After World War II, man was confronted with a new sense of uncertainty, anxiety and pessimism as religion failed to give him moral and spiritual sustenance. In this era of pessimism and nihilism sponsored by Camus, Sartre and Kierkegaard, Beckett was compelled to make new experiments. Religion gave no hope to the tramps and derelicts of Beckett. The corrosion of self became an inevitable reality. Modern age was an age in which existence came to enjoy precedence over essence. Truth assumed a life-sustaining illusion. Mind, consciousness and soul are treated as illusive and meaningless things. For the existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Karl Jaspers, failure is the fate of man whose every project is doomed. In this situation, action is futile and aspiration absurd. The existentialists thus gave eloquent expression to the current metaphysics of despair. Camus' hero is introspective, subjective and tormented by doubt. Being lost and fragmented, the neurotic protagonist who, like the neurotic characters of Kafka's novels, lives in a cosmos without direction, meaning or purpose. In the past the dramatic hero was seen in contrast to a world of unified individuals who were at peace with themselves and lived without conflicts. In today's theatre the inner struggle is not considered to be exceptional or caused by circumstances but constitutes the very definition of man.

Samuel Beckett was born on Good Friday, the 13th April, 1906, at Foxrock, a suburb of Dublin. Like his fellow Irish writers George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde and William Butler Yeats, he came from a Protestant, Anglo-Irish background. At

the age of fourteen, he went to the Portora Royal School. From 1923 to 1927, he studied Roman languages at Trinity College, Dublin, where he received his Bachelor's degree and also eventually took his M.A degree. After a brief spell of teaching in Belfast, he met the self-exiled Irish writer James Joyce, the author of the controversial and seminal modern novel *Ulysses* and joined his circle. Contrary to often-repeated reports, however, he never served as Joyce's secretary. He returned to Ireland in 1930 to take up a post as lecturer in French at Trinity College. But after only four terms he resigned in December 1931 and embarked upon a period of restless travel in London, France, Germany and Italy. In 1937, Beckett decided to settle in Paris.

As a citizen of a country that was neutral in World War II, Beckett was able to remain there even after the occupation of Paris by Germans, but he joined an underground resistance in 1941. When in 1942, he received news that members of his group had been arrested by the Gestapo, he immediately went into hiding and eventually moved to the unoccupied zone of France. Until the liberation of the country, he supported himself as an agricultural labourer. In 1945, he returned to Ireland but volunteered for the Irish Red Cross and was back in France as an interpreter in a military hospital in Saint-Lo, Normandy. In the winter of 1945, he finally returned to Paris. Samuel Beckett had seen the brutal crimes of Hitler and he was shocked to witness the holocaust of concentration camps. His faith in God was shaken and he started questioning where God is because the wholesale massacre of the Jews disturbed his mind. His *Waiting for Godot* is an epoch-making drama articulating the mood of nihilism. The play best expresses the turn of the events of

the twentieth century as the protagonists struggle to escape from self because they are too fragile to cope with their existential realities.

Beckett's few pre-war publications included two essays on Joyce and the French novelist Marcel Proust. The volume *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) contained ten stories describing episodes in the life of a Dublin intellectual, Balacqua Shuah and the novel *Murphy* (1938) concerns an Irishman in London who escapes from a girl he is about to marry to a life of contemplation as a male nurse in a mental institution. His two slim volumes of poetry were *Whoroscope* (1930), a poem on the French philosopher Rene Descartes, and the collection *Echo's Bones* (1935). A number of short stories and poems were published in various periodicals. During his years in hiding in unoccupied France, Beckett also completed another novel, *Watt*, which was not published until 1953. After his return to Paris, between 1946 and 1949, Beckett produced a number of stories, the major prose narratives *Molloy* (1951), *Mallone Meurt* (1951; *Malone Dies*), and *L'Innomable* (1953; *The Unnamable*), and two plays, the unpublished three-Act *Eleutheria* and *Waiting for Godot*. It was not until 1951, however, that these works saw the light of the day. It was with the amazing success of *Waiting for Godot* at the small Theatre de Babylone in Paris, in January 1953, that Beckett rose to the world of fame. He continued writing but more slowly than in the immediate postwar years. Plays for the stage and radio and a number of prose works occupied much of his attention. He continued to live in Paris. His total dedication to art extended to his complete avoidance of all personal publicity, of appearance on radio or television, and of all journalistic interviews. In 1969, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature for his play *Waiting for Godot*, as the play articulated the struggle of man to escape from

self. He accepted the award but declined the trip to Stockholm to avoid the public speech at the ceremonies.

S. Knowlson records that Beckett was very fond of reading Dante's *Divine Comedia* as he always carried this book and used many references in his poems and stories. In 1929, Beckett's famous essay on *Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce* expresses his interest in forms and shapes of Dante's *Loci*. Soon Beckett found teaching uncongenial and turned to writing. Beckett began his creative writing after World War II. Beckett revolutionized theatre when he published and staged *Waiting for Godot*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*. When T.S Eliot published his *The Waste Land*, he became an international celebrity. The Nobel Prize was given to Eliot. Beckett achieved the same height when *Waiting for Godot* was staged. Robert D. Lane wrote his article *Beckett's Godot: A Bundle of Broken Mirrors* (1996) in which he expressed his reactions thus:

When *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* were first produced it was apparent that the mirror was broken, and that what Beckett had was "a bundle of broken mirrors" which when dragged out on stage reflected parts of the human stature back and forth in a circular game of hats, words, repetition of scenes, and extremely clever gestures without meaning. There is no longer any delight which binds humans to the universe; there is simply waiting: waiting which fills the reprieve between birth and death, waiting which engages our attention while making the journey from spermarium to crematorium (Lane 1).

Beckett's life is really a puzzle and we can only understand through his novels and dramas. Beckett was influenced by James Joyce and Salvador Dali. Beckett introduced the themes of disintegration, action and inaction. Beckett's characters are deformed people, tramps and misfits. Beckett's perception of life and death is projected through his tramps, Lucky and Pozzo, who are doomed to wait and suffer. They are haunted by the painful moments of the past, they silently brood over death. The problem with Beckett's plays is that they were written in French and the critics find it difficult to investigate the texts of Beckett. For Beckett writing is the medium which can depict the existential reality. In introduction to volume first of *Letters of Samuel Beckett*, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck refer to Beckett's confessions recorded in his letters:

What writing and rectal spasm share is that they take the subject, quite literally, out of himself. They are not the only spasms to do this, however, and there are others which take Beckett so far out of himself that he fears he may never return (Fehsenfeld I XCV).

Beckett was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer, Proust and James Joyce as he borrowed heavily from all these nihilistic philosophers. Beckett's biographer James Knowlson observes that Beckett turned to theatre late in his life. His first play *Eleutheria*, written in French in 1947, was his first endeavour in theatre. Beckett considered it a failure and never allowed to stage it. When Samuel Beckett was writing *Waiting for Godot* he never wished to tell a well-defined story. He even didn't try to give the cathartic effect that the Greek dramas are famous for. He never tried to give any solution to the problem of human beings. The absurd dramatists tried to present their vision of the world. His first staged play, *Waiting for Godot*

(1953), brought him historical success and recognition as a playwright. Beckett came under the influence of many philosophers, thinkers, painters, existentialists and psychoanalysts. Beckett had a strong passion for innovation and experimentation. Beckett states that:

We can only remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which Habit does not possess the key (Beckett, *Proust* 31).

The most crucial influence on Beckett was of James Joyce, Proust and the Surrealist, Dali. In 1931, Beckett wrote *Proust* articulating his interest in the studies of memory. This great critical work is the result of his deep reflection on the mechanisms of memory. In this essay, Beckett discussed memory in connection with Time and Habit and there he demonstrated his interest in voluntary and involuntary memories and in the mechanisms of remembering. The evolution of anti-hero is an interesting literary trend in art, drama and fiction of the post World War era. In the contemporary society many changes took place in art and literature as new innovations were made in philosophy and psychology. New ideas were propounded that revolutionized the Western thought. New language, new words were invented to express the inner turmoil of the characters who were suffering from the traumas of war and depression. Freud and the existentialists gave new themes and techniques in art and drama. The Greek hero also suffered from isolation as his aristocratic self urged him to revolt against fate and God. However, his identity crisis did not make him a neurotic misfit and inevitably led to the age old questions of meaning,

salvation, and survival in a spiritual sense. On the contrary, the quest of the modern protagonist suffering from the corrosion of self is futile, his despair grows in a degree of intolerable anguish because he “cannot get rid of himself, cannot become nothing” (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* 110). The Existentialists took the cue from Kierkegaard and the concept of the self presented in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is abstract and beset with irreconcilable contradictions. The self, though free, is trapped in a solitude from which there is no escape. Therefore, the most conspicuous characteristic of selfhood is that “man is always separated from what he is by all the breadth of the being which he is not” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 17). Man is the being who confers meaning on the world, but this meaning is never certain. Human reality is a perpetual becoming so that “what is not determines what is” (Sartre 87). Thus, the self at all times confronts its own negation.

Ionesco also expressed the growth of nihilism as his plays dramatize senseless, absurd and useless protagonists. There is no action as all “the actions of the protagonists are absurd and useless” (Ionesco, *Antidotes* 34). The existential philosophy of Heidegger, Sartre and Camus greatly influenced the contemporary playwrights. The result was the evolution of “The Theatre of the Absurd”. War, Depression and political uncertainty also promoted pessimistic and nihilistic ideas. Man found himself alone in the terrifying universe. Beckett, Albee and Pinter were the product of the destructive forces of the Second World War. The tendencies of the total corrosion of self in a valueless society were imminent. The conventional theatre of Shaw and Arthur Miller was rejected. Anti-theatre was evolved and all the anti-theatrical techniques such as breaking down of communication, surreal elements and

plotless plays were written. Beckett's hero is a Sisyphusean type of man, alienated and uprooted from his society and the world. He is alien, unknown and indifferent. Sypher Wylie puts in this context that "Man cannot alienate himself from his own consciousness, a dilemma that brings on the present crisis in anti-literature and anti-art" (Wylie, *Loss of the Self* 17). The socio-political situation changed in post Second World War era. Old traditional art forms and standards became obsolete. Beckett gave an interview to Tom F. Driver in 1961 who made very valuable revelations. Beckett talked about form in art and the new form and new themes to be taken up by the playwrights who after the Second World War were conscious about the chaos and disharmony in life and Nature. The artists are fully aware of the responsibility entrusted to them by society. Beckett highlighted the features of Absurd drama. The plays of the absurd are formless, without beginning and middle and the traditional ending. The structure is chaotic and there is no communication.

According to Knowlson, Beckett was inspired by his mother to use the elements of psychoanalysis. Beckett admitted that he had his sessions with Bion. He attended Jung's lecture at Tavistock clinic. Matthew Feldman (2006) points out that: "Beckett's notes on psychology must be viewed in terms of a larger self-education process during the interwar years, one that was especially intense between 1932 and 1936" (Feldman, *Literary Criticism* 78). Beckett has used all the possible psychoanalytical techniques to portray the inner turbulent world of his protagonists. His characters try to repress and erase from their memories the events of the past that troubled them. But since the bitter memories are well-hidden, their recall resembles flashbacks and their main characteristic is fragmentation. The protagonists of Beckett constantly recollect the past episodes through their

flashbacks. Jeanette R. Malkin in *Memory Theatre and Post-Modern Drama* (1999) described Beckett's theatre as "memory theatre":

Memory theatre is a theatre of imitation of the repressed memories or erased memories of a shared past. In this unconventional theatre memory is lost in the abyss of mental chaos. There are only repetitions, conflation and regression. The recurrent scenes create confusion and ambiguity (Malkin 8).

Sabine Kozdon in *Memory in Beckett's Plays: A Psychological Approach* (2006) invented the term "life review" to examine the inner world of Beckett's characters. She observes that Beckett's protagonist is always haunted by old memories; "his memories often take the shape of a search for meaning" (Kozdon, *Memory in Beckett's Plays* 233). For example, she singles out "short-term memory" in *Waiting for Godot*, and attributes it to the effects of frustration. Beckett's tramps are the victims of amnesia. They have very short memory and their "forgetfulness in the drama may be interpreted as a means helping them to avoid having to tackle their frustrating situation" (Kozdon 92). Horst Breuer examined the nature of Beckett's characters and found the failure principle dominant in their lives. Logic inherent in their quest is inexplicable as their language is ambiguous. However, their reaction to frustration through, fear, aggression and regression is highly heart rending. Kozdon states that Vladimir and Estragon tend to behave in a childish manner, as a type of regression (Kozdon 236).

Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* under the influence of Joyce as he borrowed from him the new images and symbols to articulate the psychic pressures

of man. Beckett used the multiple patterns of language and images in his dramas. Anthony Cronin was the biographer of Beckett who talked about the influence of Salvador Dali. Beckett imitated the techniques of the surrealist paintings. He evolved disorientated use of language. Daniel Albright wrote *Beckett and Aesthetics* (2003) in which he observed that Beckett was influenced by Surrealism when he wrote his plays. Albright believes that “all plays of Beckett reveal the impact of the Surrealists. He also borrowed from Proust and Joyce” (Albright, *Beckett and Aesthetics* 10). *Waiting for Godot* is built on the theme of the corrosion of self. In Beckett’s play nothing happens. Beckett borrowed the concept of “formal thought disorder” from Freud and Dr. Karen Horney. He used it as a tool to evaluate Lucky’s mental disorder. Beckett’s world illuminates how “the self and non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever” (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 2). In *A Piece of Monologue* Beckett writes thus: “Birth was the death of him. Again. Words are few. Dying too. Birth was the death of him. Ghastly grinning ever since. Up at the lid to come. In cradle and crib” (Beckett, *Endgame* 425).

Freud observes that man enjoys a feeling of freedom when he is away from logic. The plays of Beckett give incoherent dialogue; the absurdity of human life is articulated in an ambiguous and grotesque language and style. There is no certainty as everything in the universe of Beckett is fluid and changeable. Our individual identity is defined by language; the loss of logical language fractures the identity of the protagonists. There is no consistent and rational thought, incoherent and non-sense talk is very common. The tramps of Beckett waste their time in discussing superficial aspects of things. Beckett himself summed up his attitude in 1949 when he observed thus:

There is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express (Beckett, *Godot* 23).

Sartre and Camus believe in existence rather than essence. Existentialists like Camus and Sartre observe that the only reality in this world is anguish and helplessness of modern man to confront the void alone. They describe the emotional despair of dealing with the absence of moral order. This chaos leads to a psychic dislocation of the characters in Beckett. They are seen lost and bewildered. Beckett observes that man doesn't want to go on but he must go on. One requires purpose in a purposeless universe. Beckett writes in *Waiting for Godot*, "Let's go" (*They do not move*). In Beckett's theatre, the metaphors of "memory", "silence" and "wait" are predominant as his plays give a challenge to investigate the philosophical, psychological and psychoanalytical problems confronted by the protagonists. Pountney is right when he observes that each play of Beckett is an integral whole, the job of a critic is to explore the hidden layers of memory, trauma and the intellectual confusion of the protagonists:

Since the art of theatre is the joining together of numerous parts to form a composite whole, it is obviously artificial to attempt to separate the parts from each other, isolating light from image, for example. At the same time it is essential to an understanding of the process of theatre to be able to see how each part operates and has its particular function in the formation of the whole (Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows* 164).

Antonin Artaud propounded a new theory of drama. He rejected realism in theatre. Artaud propagated the ideas of magical beauty and mythical power as he wanted the theatre to be a source of awareness. He wanted the playwrights to revive old myths and folk tales. He created plays evolving collective archetypes and myths. The purpose of theatre should be to excavate the inner world of the characters. The dramatist should coin new words and phrases, to achieve a sensational effect. Theatre should express the inexpressible sufferings and anxieties of human beings. Artaud was very serious to comprehend the nature of memory images and their role in theatre. He compared these memory images to the effects of plague in his book *The Theatre and Its Double* (1974):

The plague takes dormant images, latent disorder and suddenly carries them to the point of the most extreme gestures. Theatre also takes gestures and develops them to the limit. Just like the plague, it re-forges the links between what does and does not exist in material nature (Artaud 18).

Artaud believed that traditional drama was theme based drama dealing with the universal issues confronting humanity. The plays of Greek and Shakespeare had a holistic effect. It is recorded that when Beckett was in college, he came under the influence of Mallarme and the other French Symbolists. Knowlson is the famous biographer of Beckett who has made perceptive comments about the techniques and the contents of Beckett's dramatic art. Beckett made many innovations in the form and structure of drama. He creates new type of characters, the climax is abrupt and unconventional and characterization is absurd and grotesque. Beckett does not trust language to convey painful truths about human experiences. He creates a mythical

universe peopled by lonely and fragile creatures. His characters exist in a kind of dreamlike vacuum. James Knowlson commented thus:

Beckett always saw himself as belonging to and drawing from a wide European literary tradition . . . Although he was to turn away from the quest for more knowledge to the exploration of impotence and ignorance after the war years, he remained one of the most erudite writers of the twentieth century, with a range of easy reference that extended widely over many literatures (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 35).

Beckett's plays explore the nature of cognition, perception, consciousness, memory, temporality, being and non-being. There is a serious attempt to respond adequately to the three questions with which *The Unnamable* (1953) opens: 'Where now? Who now? When now?' In an interview with Charles Juliet, Beckett observed thus:

It is not easy to dramatize the theme of negation as it involves a big challenge for the playwright. The theme of "negation" is no more possible than affirmation. It is absurd to say that something is absurd. It is not so simple to protest and to go against the tradition. New gestures, language and themes have to be invented. You have to select themes that are beyond thinking and should work in an area where there are no possible solutions, or reactions (Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram Van Velde*, 165).

Beckett depicted the Freudian concept of death consciousness in the life of his protagonists. He projected his new vision of human sufferings in his plays.

Samuel Beckett lived a traumatic and mysterious life. In his youth Beckett actually suffered from depression and was admitted in the hospital. His friend Dr. Geoffrey Thomson has made many observations about the dementia of Beckett. Beckett had remarkable knowledge of variety of psychological ailments such as dementia, depression and neurosis. This reflects his understanding of abnormal human psychology. He used all these traumatic experiences freely in his novels and plays. His *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are plays about human suffering involved in human existence. Samuel Beckett repeatedly quotes Giacomo Leopardi's poem *A se stesso* in his *Proust* where he discusses the notion of desire. In *Proust*, Beckett refers to Leopardi who believed that the only solution is the removal of the desire of living. The question of the "ablation of desire" (Beckett, *Proust* 18), which Beckett refers here is the same one that riddled Leopardi and Arthur Schopenhauer. Beckett fully agreed with Proust that wisdom consists of the "ablation of desire" and in "obliterating the faculty of suffering" (Beckett, *Proust* 63). Beckett was greatly influenced by Proust who excavated the inner heart of his protagonists. Beckett borrowed many techniques from Proust and brought many changes in the form of drama. Beckett believed that suffering and boredom are two different aspects of the vast plane of Habit. It is only suffering that represents the "omission of that duty to Habit". "Suffering opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience" (Beckett, *Proust* 28). But Beckett made new innovations and followed James Joyce to explore the mystery of human sufferings. Beckett found that "the boredom of living" and "the suffering of being" always affects human beings. It is a state of mind when man experiences "the free play of every faculty" (Beckett, *Proust* 20). If man wants to achieve Proustian ideal of obliterating the

faculty of suffering, he must obliterate being, he should stop the free play of every faculty and limit existence to the very boredom of living. Martin Esslin in his *Beckett-Infinity, Eternity* (1986) explores the mystery of human sufferings depicted in his *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*:

Non-being is certainly, in Beckett's world view, preferable to being. But what fills him with the greatest dread is the fact that once a consciousness is in being, it has entered infinity of being, hence suffering. For once there is consciousness of being, it can never consciously become aware of having ceased to be. When we are dead, we cannot know that we are dead. The last moment of consciousness, then, must inevitably linger in the void forever. That, I think is the meaning of the final scene of the *Endgame* (Esslin, *Beckett-Infinity, Eternity* 114).

In 1920s when Beckett was suffering from severe depression, he read the works of Arthur Schopenhauer who believed in pessimistic and nihilistic philosophy. He opined that the world was grounded in suffering. Human desires bring pain and torment. Beckett appreciated Schopenhauer's "intellectual justification of unhappiness", he explored the mystery of human suffering in his play *Endgame*. Beckett imagined nightmarish situations for his characters and trapped them to find out how they might deal with them. Beckett depicts human condition as an inevitable part of human existence. Human condition is absurd and hopeless; Beckett expresses the experiences of sufferings through the metaphors of "silence", "waiting" and "memory" in his plays. His characters suffer from misfortunes as meaningless waiting, disillusionment of hope and abnormal relationship. They are

doomed to live in a meaningless and godless universe. They look helpless and feel trapped in a Godless universe where sufferings are an inescapable reality. Beckett reveals that all the evils, sins and disasters exist in life and man has to confront them. Suffering constitutes the centre of Beckett's plays; his protagonists are involved in multifarious situations expressing different kinds of human responses to suffering, ranging from meek passivity to rebellion and exile. No wonder, all of Beckett's protagonists are worn out with age and ailment, paralyzed and immobilized and awaiting extinction as a possible relief from their weary existence. Beckett's men and women are physically disabled, aged and derelicts. They are on the verge of decline and grotesquely entrapped. They are alienated from the universe where they ceaselessly strive to live with misery and unendurable pain. All these characters are outsiders, cut off from the world of social activity. Beckett peels off all the layers that surround life to show that at the core, everyone is suffering.

Beckett confronts the futility of existence and the tragedy of the human condition. Beckett wrote *Endgame* dealing with the absurdities and predicaments of life. The main message of his *Endgame* is that the end is in the beginning of life and "man must go on endlessly as there is no pause for him" (Beckett, *Endgame* 126). Beckett conveys "a view of life which sees birth as intimately connected with suffering and death and which sees life as a painful road to be trod" (Beckett 2). Beckett illustrates the defeated strength of 'spirit' and his protagonists experience pain and anguish. The world of Beckett is dominated by degeneration; the characters have no option but to continue the journey of life. The plays of Beckett deal with the gradual corrosion of self of the protagonists. Beckett's representation of the mind is based on the truth that the world is subject to death and decay. Paradoxically the mind of man is trapped within a body that is essentially perishing.

The Freudian concept of desire revolves around a subject whose identity is fixed in Oedipal repressions. Freudian desire is thus once more formulated in terms of loss. From Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it is laid down as a rule that the expression of desire must be sought in a dream and thus in the unconscious. Lacan in his *Ecrits* amplifies on how the dream has the structure of a rebus, that is, a form of writing (Lacan 424). Lacan investigates the concept of "desire" and its relationship with "dreams" thus:

Does it mean nothing that Freud recognized desire in dreams? . . .we must read *The Interpretation of Dreams* to know what is meant by what Freud calls 'desire' there...What we must keep in mind here is that this desire is articulated in a very cunning discourse (Lacan, *Ecrits* 620).

Since the mystery of human sufferings is explained in terms of desire and dream both by Freud and Lacan, Terry Eagleton explains desire as follows:

Desire is nothing personal. . . it is an affliction that was lying in wait for us from the outset, a tragic scenario which we inherit from our elders, a disfiguring medium into which we are plunged at birth. It is the 'object in the subject' which makes us what we are, an alien wedge at the core of our being . . . (Eagleton, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* 143).

Beckett took the meaning of suffering from Leopardian concept of "suffrance" and he changed it into the "suffering of being". In both cases pain is interwoven with the desire to cease desiring. Beckett's oeuvre gives expression to

the “ablation of desire” (Beckett, *Proust* 18). It is a state of mind which exposes the nature of human agony. Beckett in *Proust* theorizes that “whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable” (Beckett, *Proust* 17). The alienating speech of both Clov and Hamm and Nell and Nagg defines their Lacanian lack-of-being. Clov, for instance, is angry, frustrated and dissatisfied with his attempt at speech. The failure of language is evident in the fragmentary quality of Clov and Hamm’s conversation which only approximately succeeds in giving expression:

Clov: [*Sadly.*] “No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked as we.”

Hamm: “We do what we can.”

Clov: “We shouldn’t.”

[*Pause*]

Hamm: “You’re a bit of all right, aren’t you?”

Clov: “A smithereen” (Beckett, *Endgame* 123).

Hamm and Clov are forced to desire an impossible “Once!” - a never-achieved unity that will remain forever inaccessible and will inevitably keep causing pain. The characters are thus trapped into a desire for an irremediable past. In Hamm’s case there are painful childhood desires related to his “accursed progenitor” (96). In Nell and Nagg it is more a desire for the happiness of their youth (185). The sense of loss permeates all the dialogue evoking nostalgia for a previous sense of a holistic self “We change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!” (97). Death is inevitable in life as no one can escape it: “I see my light dying” (98). When Nagg says that he had lost his tooth the day before, all Nell can repeatedly sigh out in uncritical nostalgia is an elegiac: “Ah yesterday!” (99). Nell’s speech reveals an

inexorable desire for a sepia-tinted past which, by contrast, highlights the present “Desert!” (103).

Love, marriage and domestic happiness is missing in the world of Beckett. In Beckett’s plays, love can only coexist with dissatisfaction and suffering. His characters are doomed to loneliness and frustration and there is no remedy for it. Death is the central issue in *Endgame*. Nell dies in the course of the play. Nell’s death is symbolical of the end of reproduction. The play begins with the word “finished” referring to the termination of life. The characters are just anti-heroes who are confused and bewildered. They are not free. Their language is absurd and there is no communication between them. The activities of the characters and their dialogue express the negation of life. Lack of understanding is another of the features of Beckett’s characters. Even when there are two or more characters onstage, they are unable to understand each other. For instance, Vladimir wakes Estragon up because he feels lonely:

Estragon: [*restored to the horror of his situation.*] “I was asleep!”

[*Despairingly.*] “Why will you never let me sleep?”

Vladimir: “I felt lonely.”

Estragon: “I had a dream.”

Vladimir: “Don’t tell me!”

Estragon: “I dreamt that.”

Vladimir: “DON’T TELL ME!” (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 17).

Estragon is not happy with the fact of being woken up by Didi who was in need of his company. In return, Estragon wants to tell his nightmares instead of

listening to his companion. Nobody can judge the content of his nightmares. But Vladimir is not interested to listen to them. Estragon has no courage to learn something painful since nightmares are characteristic of troubled psyche and point to repressed memories. It is evident that there is failure of understanding and communication between them. That is the reason why all the characters of Beckett suffer from the absurdity of life. Man is depicted as a restless human creature, always crying and endlessly striving for nothing in particular. It is a world far beyond any labels of good and evil. Beckett wrote in *Proust* (1931) thus: “Hopelessness and fruitless struggle at the end leads to habit and boredom” (Beckett, *Proust* 28).

The characters of Beckett are anti-heroes. They submit to the absurdity of their existence and fill their lives with meaningless void: Krapp is listening to his tapes, Hamm is telling stories, Didi and Gogo are waiting etc. Nevertheless, all of them go on. Beckett’s characters do not know what to do, they are bored with their whole existence and they can only wait. In *Endgame*, the life of Clov and Hamm is grey, based on certain ritual actions such as looking through the window with a magnifying glass, asking for pain-killers, telling stories etc. They are at the end of the road, doomed to suffer the corrosion of self. Consequently, the fear of death has to do with the fear of the pain and anxiety of the process of being born. Beckett’s plays take this agonizing circular pattern of the trauma of birth. The structure of his plays is cyclical; this structure is created through language repetitions, actions and the use of the present continuous tense.

In *Waiting for Godot*, for example, Act II is a repetition with variations of Act I. In *Play*, the sound of the voices starts before the rise of the curtain and

continues after its fall, etc. All these create the continuity of the trauma of birth in life. Although death, since it is connected with birth, is also present onstage. Hamm welcomes death: "It will be the end and there I'll be, wondering what can have brought it on and wondering what can have [*He hesitates.*] ...why it was so long coming" (Beckett, *Endgame* 126). Many of Beckett's characters also think that birth was the death for them. Beckett creates images of death visually and lyrically in his theatre. The image of the three characters in urns, planted in darkness in *Play* is a visual example of death and its negation. Beckett wrote in *Proust*, that "the negation of time and Death, the negation of Death because of the negation of Time. Death is dead because time is dead" (Beckett, *Proust* 175).

Beckett recreates onstage a libido condition, similar to a mother's womb, which gives his characters a false feeling of security and control over their lives. Living is dying slowly and painfully in every Beckett's play. Death association is evoked through language, visual images, the immobility, music, stage physical language and silences. The whole universe "stinks of corpses" (Beckett, *Endgame* 114), says Hamm. Beckett's characters look helpless and feel trapped in a Godless universe where sufferings are an inescapable reality. The plays of Beckett are packed with the scenes of evil, sins, and disasters. Suffering constitutes the centre of Beckett's plays; his protagonists are involved in multifarious situations expressing different kinds of human responses to suffering, ranging from meek passivity to rebellion and exile. In accordance with this perception of suffering, all of Beckett's protagonists are worn out with age and ailment, paralyzed and immobilized, and awaiting extinction as a possible relief from their weary existence. Beckett manages to present in one simple dialogue the theme of age and body decay with bitter irony.

Absent-mindedness is another of the symptoms of memory failure. Here is an example of Estragon who does not recognize his own boots left onstage in Act I:

Estragon: “They’re not mine.”

Vladimir: [*Stupefied.*] “Not yours!”

Estragon: “Mine were black. These are brown.”

Vladimir: “You’re sure yours were black?”

Estragon: “Well, they were a kind of grey.”

Vladimir: “And these are brown? Show.”

Estragon: [*Picking up a boot.*] “Well, they’re a kind of green”
(Beckett, *Godot* 63).

Beckett’s men and women are physically disabled, aged and derelicts. They are on the verge of decline and grotesquely entrapped. They are alienated from the vast expanse of the universe where they ceaselessly strive to live with misery and unendurable pain. All these characters are outsiders, cut off from the world of social activity. Beckett peels off all the layers that surround life to show that at the core, everyone is suffering. It is pertinent to note that Beckett evolved the language of pathos, death and decay and expressed these ideas through images and symbols. Knowlson in his book *Damned to Fame* observes that Beckett made many experiments in language; he turned to Joyce and Dostoevsky for unconventional imagery and words and phrases for his dramatic texts. Beckett evolved his own unconventional language to depict the gradual corrosion and degeneration of his characters through words. Beckett had foreshadowed the inescapable chaos of existence; he invented a style of writing which would adequately convey the shapelessness of life. Hence, he had to give ‘form’ to formlessness through a

language which, itself appeared to have no form. Beckett uses all the innovative visual techniques to give the experience of live theatre. Beckett's theatre is at once visual, picturesque and loaded with images, symbols and metaphors of death, decay and corrosion of self. Beckett had sound knowledge of human psychology, memory and trauma. His passion for new images to depict the inner traumatic world of his characters brought the visual effect on the audience and when *Waiting for Godot* was staged, it was a grand success. Aristotle wrote on memory thus:

Memory [...] belongs to the same part of the soul as the imagination; it is a collection of mental pictures from sense impressions but with a time element added, for the mental images of memory are not from perception of the things present but of things past (Aristotle, *Memory and the Self* 33).

Walt Whitman brought revolution in American poetry with his language experiments; Beckett did the same the same thing in drama. In his essay *On Truth*, Nietzsche defines truth as "A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms" (Nietzsche 5). Beckett followed Nietzsche as he evolved an uncanny and ambiguous language to articulate the ambiguities and uncertainties of life. The dominant themes in the plays of Beckett are the lack of communication, alienation, loss of meaning in life and loss of memory. Consider for instance the following dialogue of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

Vladimir: "Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of

night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?" (Beckett, *Godot* 81).

Images play a crucial role in Beckett's theatre. No wonder, Beckett freely experimented with stage images: their corporeality, spatiality and their power of effect on the audience. Garner observes that the stage in Beckett's plays is turned into a visual field, or seeing-place; it is not a theatre of action and his characters are highly concerned with being perceived. Beckett has taken up the inexplicable themes of human misery, existential despair and futility of life and shapelessness of human existence. Garner further contends that Beckett uses the devices of pictorial art to portray human sufferings. In all plays, Beckett used the pictorial use of performance space.

Beckett borrowed from Dante landscapes and images which have thematic and functional significance. Beckett creates mental images to universalize the themes of death and decay and of corrosion of self. Hanna Pishwa writes that:

Mental images are structures similar to our mental representation, that is, they are not stored pictures. They differ from the latter in being eligible for transformations, which are, however, restricted in so far as some parts must remain stable (Pishwa, *The Population Impact of Severe Mental Illness* 12).

Language plays a special role in memory retrieval. Many memories are encoded in the form of images and sometimes sound. Consequently, language performs the role of a translator of a conversion of non-linguistic elements, images,

sounds, smells and sensations play a vital role in recording the non-linguistic memories. Verbalizing our memories makes them coherent and real to others. Cathy Caruth discusses the symptoms of trauma in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996). She narrated the importance to have a witness to listen to our story in the light of the survivors of the concentration camps. It was crucial for the prisoners to give voice to their sufferings since if they died before telling others of their ordeals, their memory would die with them. Voice is a form of power which makes others listen to us. Thus, who is given voice is given authority. This can be applied to Beckett's theatre as well. Practically all of his characters, although craving for darkness, want to be heard and to be seen.

For Artaud, the physical stage language has a beauty of its own and its aim is to achieve "intellectual effectiveness as spoken language" (Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* 151). Indeed, Beckett has made a revolution in the theatre aesthetics of staging trauma. In majority of his plays, the stage has a hallucinatory dream-like quality. Scarcity of objects, strange lighting, deformed bodies or just body parts, voices coming from the void and darkness, the grey-white clothing of his characters are only some of the features that surprise the audience. Freud describes the occurrence of traumatic memories in the third Chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The pattern of sufferings is persistent and comes in the form of nightmares and painful re-enactments totally outside the control of the victim. Knowlson concludes by saying that Beckett's theatre is visual theatre as perception plays a great role in decoding theatre images:

The images that Beckett creates onstage look more like sculptures or paintings unique in their nature and impossible to forget. It seems that he destroys the boundary between drama and painting. In some of his plays the audience sees three-dimensional statues onstage, since only the lips of the characters are moving in a play (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 123).

Waiting for Godot is packed with circular motions, echoes, ghostly voices and grotesque actions. Beckett has an unconventional view of time and the transient nature of life. His plays are packed with the images of change and mutability. Beckett firmly believed that there is nothing in the world that is permanent since the world is subject to death and decay. Man is preconditioned to change from his birth, since nothing stays the same for him. Since the moment of birth, time influences one's physical growth and psychological maturity. Human beings are changing states all the time. In Beckett's *Endgame*, Hamm describes this change: "But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (Beckett, *Endgame* 97). Hamm aptly sums up the physical as well as psychological changes in human lives. Gary Adelman in his book *Naming Beckett's Unnamable* points out that the world of *Endgame*, "negates time itself" (108) and this sentiment is echoed in Hamm's interjection: "moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended" (133). Clov complains that he is seeing his light die but Hamm ignores him and demands: "take a look at me" (98). Clov is very irritating in his behaviour towards Hamm; he tells us the horrible existence of Hamm who lives in his kitchen "ten feet by ten feet by ten feet" (93).

Beckett has introduced the subtle images of light and darkness in the plots of his plays. Beckett's main concern is to depict the inner turmoil of his protagonists who are trapped in an absurd situation of life. The powerful images of light and darkness are used to excavate the inner turmoil of his characters. Artaud inspired Beckett to use the powerful images of light and darkness to achieve the multidimensional effect. Artaud highly recommended the image of light as a tool to explore the inner world of the characters: "In the theatre, as in the plague, there is a kind of strange sun, an unusually bright light by which the difficult, even the impossible suddenly appears to be our natural medium" (Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* 21). Thus, the light may be the source of the divine which uncovers the Truth for man. But in some of the scenes time is symbolized as the instrument of torture. Beckett's characters reject the divine providence, "Damn the sun", says Clov in *Endgame* (107), not only because the sun obstructs his vision of the horizon but also because Clov cannot accept the divine providence since it is practically the end of their world. Many of Beckett's plays are staged in semi-darkness; this darkness may be discussed as an intensifier of personal memory. Rodriguez-Gago writes about the stage darkness in Beckett's theatre creating the illusion of fantasy:

The theatre of Beckett is the house of memory containing fragmented and ghostly images, some of which are embodied in performance, forced by the stage light and others will remain hidden or forgotten in the dark waiting, perhaps, to be rescued in a different time and at a different place (Gago, *The International Reception of Samuel Beckett* 4).

Beckett exploits the condition of being trapped to an extreme. Beckett's characters are not comfortable onstage: Estragon's boots are killing him, Vladimir suffers from a poor bladder, Pozzo loses his eyesight. Hamm's reminiscences describe the view of death and decay as he is always haunted by the memories of losing his sight. Hamm expresses his sense of loss to Clov through the image of "sight" and "motion". Hamm predicts the future thus:

"One day you'll be blind, like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me...infinite emptiness will be all round you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it, and there you'll be like a little." (Beckett, *Endgame* 20).

Beckett's kitchen room in the plot is a symbol of hell. Beckett created the mysterious image of the kitchen room in the play *Endgame* to describe the nature of hell. Knowlson observes that Beckett came under the influence of Jack Yeats and his subjective paintings. W.B Yeats' images and symbols depicted in his *Purgatory* also captivated Beckett. The images and symbols are created to articulate the plight of the characters, their existential despair and poignant trauma. Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun* describes the atmosphere of *Endgame* as a "living death. She describes the hellish condition as:

... a devitalized existence that, although occasionally fired by the effort I make to prolong it, is ready at any moment for a plunge into death ... I live a living death, my flesh is wounded, bleeding, cadaverized, my rhythm slowed down or interrupted, time has been erased or bloated, absorbed into sorrow (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 4).

Andrew Brink in his article *Samuel Beckett's Endgame and the Schizoid Ego* observes that for Clov and Hamm the outside world is depicted as a hell: “another hell, nothing stirring, no sun, no light, no darkness just gray” (Brink, *Samuel Beckett's Endgame and the Schizoid Ego* 32). Hamm gives the image of the mad painter suggesting that the world is on the verge of collapse. He refers to the destructive and pessimistic images suggestive of global disaster. Hamm’s speech is threatening and menacing:

“I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I’d take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness!” (*Pause*) (Beckett, *Endgame* 44).

Beckett uses the technique of photographic memory to give multiple layers of ambiguities in his plot. He borrowed the techniques of nonlinearity from the paintings of Dali. He invented new and fantastic dream imagery to articulate the ambiguity and absurdity of human life. Beckett has introduced only one kitchen door leading to Clov’s kitchen. The kitchen has symbolical significance in the thematic structure of the drama. Kitchen is the important place where Clov comes and goes. In fact there is no door out of this room, it is a family room in which all gather and talk endlessly. Consequently, there is no escape from their situation of dependence. So, this room has a claustrophobic and ghastly quality. Worth calls this kitchen room “one of his most haunting spaces”. This family room which contains three generations, has a painful home concept, since all the characters are practically

imprisoned together, doomed to listen to each other's stories. This kitchen room is a veritable hell. This kitchen room has transcendental features and symbolical significance, the room keeps the family members together in one place: it is their beginning and their end. But there is no physical unity between the characters. Many of Beckett's characters think that birth was death for them. Beckett writes in *A Piece of Monologue* thus: "Birth was the death of him. Again. Words are few. Dying too. Birth was the death of him" (425). Beckett has revolutionized theatre inventing uncanny images of death in his plays. The image of the three characters in urns, planted in darkness in *Play* is a visual example of death and its negation. Knowlson also opines that he recreates onstage a libido condition that is similar to a mother's womb. The characters derive a false feeling of security and control over their lives. Living is dying slowly and painfully in every play of Beckett. Death association is evoked through language, visual images, his character's immobility, music, stage physical language and silences. "The whole universe stinks of corpses" (Beckett, *Endgame* 114), says Hamm.

The world of Beckett is on the verge of total annihilation and the characters suffer from dementia and physical decay. Beckett uses all the psychoanalytical ailments to depict the corrosion of self of his protagonists. Beckett's characters suffer from fading memories and forgetfulness caused by their bodily dysfunctions. According to Bergson, perception is vital for good construction of our memories. In old age man loses his perception because of physical ailments. With the loss of physical vitality, his memory loss shatters his identity. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud deals with the trauma of aging. Though aging could be viewed as common trauma, it affects a person's identity as with aging a person becomes

vulnerable and dependent. No wonder Beckett's characters have a blurred vision of reality. Beckett creates ghostly images to portray the absent memory of his aging characters. Their past memories are more vivid and colourful. In *The Seven Sins of Memory* (2001), Schacter deals with the most common failures of memory in the elderly people. He observes that there are many stages of memory loss but the most significant are "memory malfunctions", "absent-mindedness" and "blocking" (Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory* 4). He analyzed further on in relation to Beckett's characters' memories. Beckett's characters suffer from short memory; they are absent minded and block heads.

Old memories of Beckett's characters are always haunting them; they are wandering and in the abyss of mind. Beckett is a powerful ingenious image monger. Beckett's character recollects a concrete image and then it is given a cyclical turn, the image goes in circles disturbing the thought patterns of the character. New sensations are created in the mind of the character. They start inventing stories and behave in an abnormal manner like a neurotic. Obviously, the monotony of life and old age can only contribute to the failing memories of all the characters of Beckett. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon forgets all about what has happened in the First Act and Pozzo is not even able to remember having met Vladimir and Estragon yesterday. The flow of time is not perceived in the same way by these characters. Beckett rejects memory in the form of an album of photographs. For him, habit destroys memory. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for the mysterious Godot. Clov is observing the horizon, Estragon is playing with his boots and Didi is playing with his hat. Vladimir becomes restless when he cannot remember the names and places.

In Endgame, the audience discovers that Hamm's face is covered by a handkerchief with blood. There are the two windows, one opening on the sea and the other towards the earth. Symbolically, the windows refer to the resonations with the "Book of Revelations". Like two witnesses, Hamm and Clov are condemned to await the arrival of the two beasts: one from the sea and another from the earth. Both Hamm and Clov are being devoured alive by their private memories. The audience note that both Hamm and Clov are buried in earth alive as Clov says that the outside is devastated and still: "no waves, no wind, and corpse" (Beckett, *Endgame*106). In fact, it is state of psychological burial as Hamm says: "We are down in the hole" (111). For the first time, Hamm sees the landscape of hell present everywhere as he says: "outside here it's death (96). Hamm refers to inside as "Old wall!" [*Pause.*] "Beyond is the other hell." [*Pause. Violently.*] "Closer! Closer! ..." (104).

Beckett uses the powerful images of death, hell and damnation to depict the traumatic loss of self of Hamm and Clov. Hellish outside may be mirrored by the traumatic inside, and though sheltered, neither Hamm nor Clov can find a way to escape their memories. Hamm has reached the final stage of his fragmentation and decay; he experiences a strange relation with the outside world. He is interested whether there are any changes in the horizon, but at the same time he gets agitated talking about it. He tries to experience the outside world from inside, e.g. feel the sun on his face from the open window. But the outside is alien to him:

Hamm: "I was never there." [*Pause.*] "Clov!"

Clov: [*Turning towards Hamm, exasperated.*] "What is it?"

Hamm: "I was never there."

Clov: "Lucky you." [*He looks out of the window.*]

Hamm: “Absent, always. It all happened without me. I do not know what’s happened.” [*Pause.*] “Do you know what’s happened?” [*Pause.*] “Clov!” (Beckett, *Endgame* 128).

The plot of the play is dominated by the metaphors of memory and identity. For Beckett’s characters every day looks the same. Boredom and habit continuously destroy his character’s fragile aging memories. “Life is habit” writes Beckett in *Proust*. According to Bergson, man has a certain necessity for fixation, in order to feel secure and stable. His past is the sequence of different identities or past consciences, which are all stored in his memory and constitute his present identity. In connection with this, Bergson defines two types of memories, which affect the formation of our identities: present memory, which affects man’s present actions; and authentic memory, which stores the chronology of time and images. The unity of identities is extremely important for man’s personality. Descartes in *Consciousness and Past Life Regression* wrote: “I think therefore I am... I remember therefore I am.” According to Bergson, it is our autobiographic memory that defines man’s character. Alfred Adler in his book *Neurotic Connection* contends that old age, blindness, different organ amputation, dysfunctions of nervous system lead to the decrease of certain sensorial perception. Adler’s theory is applicable on the characters of Beckett since the majority of them are sick aging people. Klein noted that the self is a product of the individual’s personal memories. Cameron, Wilson, Ross have discussed that the “reciprocal nature of memory is again illustrated when a lack of self-identity appears to disrupt memory and in turn, memory deficits disturb one’s sense of self” (Cameron, *The Identity Function of Autobiographical Memory* 208). In their book *The Self and Memory*, Beike,

Lampinen and Behrend observe that memory is not “a passive tape-recorder”, thus it selects the material to be stored in the conscious and active brain. For Beckett, these periods are normally painful and mysterious as they replace the boredom of living by the suffering of being. Only when an individual is taken out of his daily routine, he is capable of seeing himself as he is. Beckett connects these moments of change with suffering and strong emotions.

Memory is one of the main characteristics of human beings, since it makes us the way we are. Memory influences the present and future of human beings. Experiences shape the present personality and influence the future decisions of human beings. Men construct their identities upon the canvas of their memory. Happy memories make them optimistic and open to new experiences; sad and traumatic memories bring a negative attitude towards the future. Often, human beings become introverted and bitter because of their sad experiences. Images play a crucial role in Beckett’s theatre. Knowlson observes that Beckett felt more at home in the company of painters than that of writers. No wonder, he started to experiment with stage images: their corporeality, spatiality, even with their absence and the effect that they could produce. Garner opines that the stage in Beckett’s plays is turned into a visual field or a seeing-place and is not a theatre of action. His characters are very much concerned with being perceived.

It is pertinent to note that Beckett was interested in the workings of involuntary memory, as he wrote in *Proust* that Estragon, who continuously demonstrates his poor memory for names and events, still remembers some proper names “The Dead Sea” and “the Rhone”. These are clear examples of open memories in Beckett’s theatre, since no understanding of them is reached by the

characters of his plays. Memories play a vital role in the structure of Beckett's plays. Beckett commented about one of his experiences connected with his childhood memories at a session with Wilfred Bion as reported by Knowlson thus:

I remember how I would lie on my sofa to recollect the past. I can say that the past memories helped me a lot to gain peace of mind and to control my depression. I certainly came with extraordinary memories of being in a womb. In trauterine memories. I was fully trapped and would wish to stay there far away from the sordid and traumatic realities of existence (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 177).

Beckett's language is lyrical, symbolical and poetical. Memories of Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, Pozzo, Ham and Clov are recorded in the form of images, sensations and sounds. The words are broken, dialogues are brief but deep in meaning since the focus of Beckett is to excavate the inner traumatic world of his protagonists who find themselves trapped. In Beckett's plays the problem of an identity is raised to an extreme, his characters are painfully trying to order their fragmented scattered memories in time to prove their past existence. They are incessantly telling stories from their past as though translating and re-translating their memories in words. In fact, Beckett's characters present a certain memory crisis, since they are unable to order their memories in time and those memories acquire multiplicity of voices. Therefore, the past is disorganized and not chronologically linked and the present is not registered in their memories.

Beckett's characters are quite fond of playing onstage, for example, Vladimir and Estragon wait under the barren tree, Winnie plays with her objects taking them

from and then putting them into the bag and the essence of return is inscribed in Beckett's *Come and Go*, where three female characters continuously exchange their places onstage talking secretly to one another about the other's imminent death. Hamm in *Endgame* even goes further and returns his own parents, Nagg and Nell, to a pre-natal situation, accommodating them in two closed containers, which may resemble wombs. The parents of Hamm behave in an unnatural manner since their only preoccupations are with food and they enjoy sucking a biscuit and with the change of sawdust. All of Beckett's characters are placed in a difficult situation and try to go on as best as they can. So death does not claim Beckett's characters and the playwright denies them the right to commit suicide: "Didi and Gogo try to hang themselves, but in vain, the bough won't support their weight" (Beckett, *Godot* 18). So his characters exist on stage or in his plays, haunted by the ghosts of their fading memories.

The room as setting is always the traumatized images container in Beckett's theatre which makes it interesting for the analysis in relation to different types of trauma. The room can be related to a character on a very private level. Besides, as the room is a closed space, having walls as frontiers, it can reflect such features as imprisonment or shelter. For all its convincing realism, the room also has all enveloping, claustrophobic psychic climate, especially when characters' movements are restricted by the room boundaries. Moreover, when a character imprisons himself inside the room, he isolates himself from the outer world and presents catatonic symptoms that point to neuroses or trauma. Beckett creates out of those rooms a painful childhood home, which contains the nightmarish experiences of characters, their obsessions and inner conflicts. For example, Rabinovitz suggests

that Nagg and Nell may personify repressed memories, thus they are kept in closed containers; and when Hamm orders Clov to “chuck it in the sea!” (Beckett, *Endgame* 103), actually, he wants to get rid of this type of memory. The audience is invited into the deeper world of the psyche of characters. Paul Lawley states that “the central image of *Endgame* is the psychological condition of man trapped in the metaphysical absurdity of life. The play presents the end of the mind in apocalyptic terms” (Lawley, *Drama of Beckett* 49).

Place as a problem is a recurrent feature in Beckett’s drama. His characters are never comfortable in their environment. The concept of a comfortable home is absent. Willie in *Happy Days* is willing to leave his home to escape his miserable life. Clov tries to leave Hamm’s house at the end of *Endgame*, though the audience will never know what he intends to do. Unfortunately, Beckett’s characters are unable to leave and have to be there: “onstage victims of their environment” as Nell observes: “There is nothing funnier than unhappiness” (Beckett, *Endgame* 101). For Bergson, image is immobile and only perception and attention transforms it into reality. Beckett in *Proust* also discusses memory as “obviously conditioned by perception” (30). He states that:

We can only remember what has been registered by our extreme inattention and stored in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which Habit does not possess the key (Beckett, *Proust* 31).

Indeed, Beckett’s world is actually inhabited by handicapped aging characters: blind, lame, deaf people. Beckett was merely staging man’s impotence.

Endgame and *Waiting for Godot* present Hamm and Pozzo as blind characters. They need another character to provide them with the outer world information stored in their memories. Since Beckett's characters get enveloped in darkness, they lose the sense of orientation and time. They become trapped in the sensations of their past: a sense of perception, which once lost, operates on the level of involuntary memory. In Beckett's theatre, the question of perception and the constitution of meaning is vital in his plays. The process of perception is constituted by an act of seeing and decoding of a stage image. Beckett is very particular about the arrangements of objects, colours, shapes, movements and sizes. Indeed, these different objects influence and condition the moods and actions of the characters. Memories and experiences are very important in decoding a certain image.

The word 'trauma' originates from Greek and its direct translation is *wound*. Sigmund Freud explored the nature of trauma in his seminal book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud discussed the various symptoms of trauma and came to the conclusion that mind is inflicted by trauma and not the body of a man. Trauma is a psychological destructive wound. Sigmund Freud was the first to give the theoretical concept of trauma in his essay *On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena* (1893). Trauma, according to Otto Rank, is present in every person's life since the moment of birth. Vladimir unites both the traumas of life and death when he observes thus: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries" (Beckett, *Godot* 84). In *The Trauma of Birth*, Otto Rank points out an extremely painful moment of a child on leaving the mother's womb, which is associated with pain, and separation. The first symptom that he dwells upon is the anxiety of breathing. The memory of breathing obviously belongs to our

implicit memory, since no one teaches us how to breathe. Caruth, in *Unexplained Experiences*, observes that “trauma is more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out” (Caruth 4). Beckett’s interest in Psychology and psychoanalysis found its way into Beckett’s *Psychology Notes*. Knowlson records that Beckett himself developed the symptoms of neurosis:

Beckett discussed in detail his symptoms of depression and anxiety to Bion. He presented all the symptoms to Bion in his opening session. He told him how he suffered from a bursting arrhythmic heart, night sweats and often he experienced panic and breathlessness. Indeed, he was the victim of severe paralysis (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 176).

Beckett took keen interest in Psychology, psychoanalysis and mental illnesses. He used his knowledge when he conceived characters such as Lucky, Pozzo, Ham and Nell and many others who are sick and decadent suffering from the psychological traumas. In *Psychology Notes*, Beckett demonstrated his deep interest in the unconscious, mental diseases and troubled psyche. Matthew Feldman observes thus:

A number of other summarized passages point to Beckett’s interest in those psychologically imperceptible parts of mental reality: repressed memories, dreams, psychoanalytic symbols, preconscious thoughts and so on (Feldman, *Literary Criticism* 108).

Katherine Worth found that in *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon complains of continuous beatings during the night. At night the subconscious emerges in our

dreams and makes us remember. Probably, Estragon was really not beaten, but dreamt of an event that had happened to him once and was not accepted on a conscious level. Obviously, he does not bear any signs of beating the following day. In fact, all those beatings are simply his nightmares or anxiety dreams due to a previous trauma. "Beckett touches the springs of our sympathy by being exceptionally ready to expose his most intimate memories. Probably, no other playwright has made such bold, continuous and self-lacerating use of his own life" (Katherine, *Beckett the Shape Changer* 27). The trauma of aging is relevant in Beckett's work. There are practically no young characters in his theatre, the exception may be the boy in *Waiting for Godot*, who is a secondary character. Old age is merciless with our body and mind which are in degeneration and decay. Beckett has a deep interest in experimenting with elderly people who suffer from illnesses and disability. He himself experienced the process of aging early, since his diseases were numerous. Knowlson states that Beckett himself suffered from the traumas of "palpitations, spasms, suffocations, sebaceous cysts on the anus, eczema, herpes on the face, etc" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 668). Beckett vividly presents tramps and disabled people on the stage depicting the helplessness of man and the traumas of inescapable human sufferings.

Vladimir has a weak bladder and Clov is lame. Pozzo and Hamm are blind, besides Hamm is paralytic, bound to a wheel chair. Beckett's elderly characters are victims of physical and psychological diseases. Estragon has problems putting his boots on and Hamm is in constant dependence on Clov for performing all the daily chores. They are on the extremity of despair; their old aging bodies do not want to go on but still they go on. Hamm continuously inquires Clov about his eyes and legs

in *Endgame*, the only answer that Clov gives is “bad” (Beckett, *Endgame* 110). The language and movements express their bodily ailments. In *Waiting for Godot* all the four characters collapse on the floor and cannot rise. It seems that they have forgotten the habit of locomotion. It seems that in the old age Beckett’s characters forget how to perform essential bodily functions, and there is a clear evidence of a reverse to childhood:

Nagg: “Can you see me?”

Nell: “Hardly. And you?”

Nagg: “What?”

Nell: “Can you see me?”

Nagg: “Hardly”.

Nell: “So much the better, so much the better.”

Nagg: “Don’t say that. [*Pause.*] Our sight has failed.”

Nell: “Yes” (Beckett, *Endgame* 99).

Estragon is a confused personality, he is uncertain about the colour of his own boots, he is uncertain about the place of his meeting. All these symptoms of memory failure virtually deflate his personality and the result his corrosion of self. Beckett’s protagonists are always routine-trapped; their yesterdays are the same as today and tomorrows, since nothing exciting happens in their lives. This uneventfulness only contributes to the blurring of their present with their past. Time itself becomes insignificant for them. Hamm, for example, asks: “What month are we?” (Beckett, *Endgame* 124). Beckett obviously creates the sense of time lapse or total suspension. Duration itself is represented only through continuous movement and by present continuous tenses. These convert his characters into ghosts of the

past struggling with their fading memories. Beckett's plays deal with the trauma of failure. His major plays depict the trauma of failure through the themes of absurdity of human existence, the loneliness of his characters, the impossibility to love and to be loved and the failure of language to communicate sufferings of life and their death consciousness. As a result of this trauma, Beckett's characters withdraw from the world, finding shelter in their everyday routines, and shutting themselves in their rooms. They do not consider that the future holds something good for them. No special plans for tomorrow are made. In *Waiting for Godot*, Didi and Gogo make an appointment with Godot by the tree to continue their fruitless waiting. Beckett's characters have no hope for the future. They are always haunted by their past. In the plays of Beckett, life is depicted as meaningless. In *Waiting for Godot*, Didi and Gogo want to repent of having been born. In *Endgame*, Hamm declares that "the end is in the beginning and yet you go on" (Beckett, *Endgame* 127).

All of Beckett's characters are haunted by the failure of ending: "And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to ... to end" (93), says Hamm in *Endgame*. All of them are craving for eternal silence and verbal void, which are impossible to achieve. Beckett's characters equate silence and darkness with non-existence. Beckett's characters are placed in a difficult situation and try to go on as best as they can. So death does not claim Beckett's characters and the playwright denies them the right to commit suicide: "Didi and Gogo try to hang themselves, but in vain, the bough won't support their weight (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 18-19). So his characters exist on stage haunted by the ghosts of their fading memories. Indeed, Beckett has articulated their corrosion of self through two important psychological symptoms, the failure of memory and the failure of language contribute to their growing

nihilism and pessimism in the protagonists. In *Waiting for Godot*, Lucky is unable to find out words to provide meaning and the result is his fragmented memory as there is no sequence of ideas in his long speech. In Beckett's theatre, objects become symbols of their past, the old characters struggle to recollect and manipulate them in vain.

In *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, Beckett introduced a unique setting for staging. He invented many anti-theatrical techniques to dramatize the absurdity and growing corrosion of self of his characters. Hamm's room is the stage within a stage. In *Endgame* in their post-apocalyptic situation, Beckett's protagonists are trapped in a room. They have to rely on a few props, the gaff, the stuffed dog, a whistle, and a telescope. Beckett has also introduced the picture and the alarm clock in the drama. All these have symbolical significance as these props project their inner void. Hamm struggles to continue the dialogue to keep up his spirits. Finally, Clov brings it onstage and starts to manipulate it physically setting it off for everybody to hear:

Hamm: "What are you doing?"

Clov: "Having an idea." [*He paces.*] "Ah!" [*He halts.*]

Hamm: "What a brain!" [*Pause.*] "Well?"

Clov: "Wait!" [*He meditates. Not very convinced.*] "Yes..." [*He raises his head.*] "I have it! I set the alarm." [*Pause.*]

Clov: "I'll go and see." [*Exit Clov. Brief ring of alarm offstage. Enter Clov with alarm-clock. He holds it against Hamm's ear and releases alarm. They listen to it ringing to the end. Pause.*] "Fit to wake the dead! Did you hear it?"

Hamm: “Vaguely.”

Clov: “The end is terrific!” (Beckett, *Endgame*, 114-115).

Harold Bloom finds a symbolical significance of the stage within a stage, as he questions:

Beckett revived Shakespearean theatre in his play by introducing a play within a play as we find in *Hamlet*. The staging of *Endgame* is on the line of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Hamm’s room is a stage within a stage symbolizing the larger stage of the world. In Hamm’s room the audience is also included as the actors (Bloom, *Samuel Beckett: Modern Critical Views* 10).

The alarm-clock and the toy-dog lose their conventional meanings in *Endgame* and create other layers of understanding, as the functions attributed to them are various. The alarm-clock is one of the props in the play which acquires multiple functions. The presentation of the alarm-clock is rather peculiar. Firstly, it is created verbally as a bright idea by Clov, later on, the alarm-clock is set off in the kitchen, and the audience only hears a brief ring. It seems that Hamm cannot hear it. Finally, Clov brings it onstage and starts to manipulate it physically, setting it off for everybody to hear. Indeed, the alarm-clock is used to pass or to kill time because of boredom, as Clov and Hamm do not know what to do. Clov has the magnificent idea of playing with the alarm-clock, thus it is used as entertainment or a toy to kill time: through its manipulation, Clov makes it sound. No wonder that afterwards both characters listen attentively until the clock finishes ringing. Both Hamm and Clov are afraid of silence and the ringing of the clock occupies the soundscape of the play

for some brief time, giving the characters some rest from speaking. The shrill ringing of the clock is the only sound heard by the audience, thus it adds another voice onstage and it is a rather unpleasant one due to its acoustic characteristics. At the same time, it breaks the monotony of the onstage action or non-action. Clov is actually playing with time, setting the alarm-clock off. He points to its extraordinary quality to wake the dead which is an ironic remark. Another meaning to Clov's manipulation with the alarm-clock can be his reminding Hamm of his desire to leave:

Clov: "Yes. But now it's empty." [*Pause. Clov starts to move about the room. He is looking for a place to put down the alarm-clock.*]

Hamm [*soft*]: "What'll I do?" [*Pause. In a scream.*] "What'll I do? What are you doing?"

Clov: "Winding up" (Beckett, *Endgame* 127).

The dog occupies the third place in the list of Hamm's preferences; its connection with his parents is obvious. The dog is certainly linked to Hamm's childhood trauma since Hamm experienced the trauma of loss early in his childhood, he is probably unable to "feel love, several times in the play he speaks about his heart as a big sore" (107). His parents only gave him a worthless life of suffering, thus the dog means the only affection bond for him. The dog is mentioned six times in the text: at the very beginning, in the middle and at the very end.

Normally Hamm asks for the dog, when Clov speaks about his leaving him, so the dog takes on the role of a pacifier, which brings us again to the trauma of birth. It seems that Clov's threat to leave Hamm triggers some other abandonment in

his life. Freud claimed that the centre of any trauma is a motivated unconsciousness. Hamm cannot see the toy-dog due to his blindness and he is fond of handling it but the dog is a monstrosity to the audience:

Clov: ... "I'll leave you."

Hamm: "Is my dog ready?"

Clov: "He lacks a leg."

Hamm: "Is he silky?"

Clov: "He's kind of a Pomeranian."

Hamm: "Go and get him."

Clov: "He lacks a leg."

Hamm: "Go and get him!" (Beckett, *Endgame* 111-112).

Dementia is a major tool used by Beckett in his plays leading to the corrosion of self of the protagonists. Memory plays an important role in the plays of Beckett. His characters present both remembering and forgetting. His interest in the studies of memory is appreciated by all critics. Beckett wrote *Proust* (1931) which is the result of his deep reflection on the mechanisms of memory. In this essay, Beckett discussed memory and demonstrated his interest in voluntary and involuntary memories and in the mechanisms of remembering life material in his works. His characters often express the pain of loss of memory. Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* has difficulty finding the exact word: "But we were there together, I could swear to it. Picking grapes for a man called ... can't think of the name of the man at a place called ... can't think of the name of the place, do you not remember?" (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 55).

Beckett had profound distrust of memory functioning. Knowlson has recorded that Beckett had personal experiences of trauma and trauma charged memories. He had a comprehensive knowledge of human psychology which he applied in creating damaged, misfits and mangled characters. Beckett's *Proust Monograph* (1930) describes his perception about amnesia and dementia. In his plays, the characters suffer from memory loss. Lacan observes that the unconscious is structured like a language. For Lacan, dissecting language is dissecting the unconscious. John Pilling in his book *Samuel Beckett* (1976) comments thus:

For Beckett language is an important tool to invent the memory of his sick and crippled tramps. Most of his characters are impaired and their language is also broken and disintegrated. There is an important lack of communication as he relies on dots and pauses. In fact there is no communication as there is no action (Pilling, *Samuel Beckett* 69).

The psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones, Alfred Adler, Carl Gustav Jung, Karin Stephens and Otto Rank are of the view that a stressed character cannot focus on the activities around him. Man suffers from the loss of memory when he is tense or stressed. Emotional trauma often leads to memory loss. In this state, mental functions such as reasoning, thinking, communication of some event or experience get impaired. It has been pointed out that Beckett's characters are not donned with perfect memories; old age and brain dysfunctions, such as dementia, amnesia and even Alzheimer seem to affect their memories. His characters with poor and failing memories only add humanity to his characters. But Vladimir confesses the loss of memory thus: "at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is in us" (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 73). It is obvious that a spectator may identify his own

self with the process of aging, normally feared by the majority. Paine aptly observes thus:

Beckett doesn't allow us to examine the psychic pressures of man. Man remains stuck in the mud and there is no escape for him, no respite for him from the quagmire of depression, nausea and angst. He is confused and bewildered as he can never dream of any glorification of life. He is always haunted by death (Paine, *Motives and Modernism* 46).

Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* has difficulty finding the exact word: "One is supposed to have been saved and the other ... [*He searches for the contrary of saved.*] ... damned" (Beckett, *Godot* 14). Estragon cannot remember the man they were picking grapes for:

"But we were there together, I could swear to it. Picking grapes for a man called ... [*He snaps his fingers.*] ... can't think of the name of the man at a place called ... [*snaps his fingers*] ... can't think of the name of the place, do you not remember" (Beckett, *Godot* 55).

Dementia begins with anxiety and depression, repression and denial of any type brings changes in the behaviour of the protagonists. Common symptoms are irritation, aggressiveness, and changes in moods, hysterical dreams, lack of decision, and lack of communication. In Beckett's world the characters are deformed and misfits. Hamm is blind and he has to depend upon the wheel chair. He suffers from severe headaches. Nagg and Nell are legless. Nagg's hearing sense is impaired and Nell is unable to cry. Clov has stiff legs and he is unable to sit down. There is no

growth in the universe of Beckett. Hamm says: “But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!”(Beckett, *Endgame* 107). Growth is measured in terms of decay. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir has prostrate problem. He acts as a child and suffers from dementia. Vladimir maintains a lively cerebral activity. Estragon always appears to suffer from severe amnesia. They live in a hollow world groping in the darkness. The play is populated with mangled characters who are time and again suffering the traumas of the corrosion of self. Harold Bloom finds the world of Beckett so horrific because of “time consciousness” (Bloom, *Samuel Beckett: Modern Critical Views* 7). It is cruel time which kills the Beckettian characters before they actually die. Malkin observes that Beckett’s plays belong to memory theatre:

Memory theatre dramatizes repressed or erased memories of a shared past, the characters often look confused in such a theatre. Their conversation is broken and disjointed with many pauses as they cannot concentrate; their memories are blurred and vision disintegrated. We often find the elements of regression, repetition, conflation and through recurrent scenes, involuntary voice, echoing (Malkin, *Matters of Memory in Krapp’s Last Tape* 8).

The majority of critics of Beckett observe that language ceases to be the only signifier of meaning, voice and image gain prominence. Samuel Beckett was always interested in images and voices. Beckett’s theatre is practically populated with ghostly voices from the past haunting the present. Each character possesses more than one voice; these voices can belong to their past selves or can be fragments of their consciousness. Beckett gives his characters a new opportunity to pass life and

to fight with existential boredom. Vladimir and Estragon are idlers, confused and directionless. They indulge in superfluous games just to fritter away their energies. In Beckett's theatre, memory and trauma are fully interwoven. Beckett employs the physical stage language to demonstrate that trauma can remodel identity and reality. Freud and the Freudians state that trauma is a special form of memory. There occurs a gap in a person's memory which leads to fractured identity. Traumatic experience cannot be articulated in verbal language, non-dramatic conventions such as images, flashbacks, repetitions, emotions and behavioural re-enactments best express trauma. The plays *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* have depicted the traumatic experiences of the characters who are borderlines suffering from dementia. Hamm, Lucky, Vladimir, Estragon and Pozzo are anchored in their memories and both have behavioural re-enactments which are symptoms of trauma. Traumatic memory images may be paralleled to the effects of the plague as stated in Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*:

The plague takes dormant images visualizing disorder and the most extreme form of gestures. In Theatre also such extreme gestures are developed to communicate the link between what exists in the universe and what doesn't exist like the plague (Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* 18).

Malkin observes that in Beckett's theatre voices are as sonic images, they are present everywhere, they constitute "Beckett's boundless void" (Malkin, *Matters of Memory in Krapp's Last Tape* 16). Malkin writes:

The images function as memory triggers, evoking the sense and sensations of the plays, nerves, rather than the words or stories. It is through the image – rather than through any plot line or character development – that we intuit the complexity of these dramas of absence and fragmentedness (Malkin, *Matters of Memory in Krapp's Last Tape* 41).

Sabine Kozdon comments upon the significance of ashbins in *Endgame* as memory containers:

Nag and Nell, who often live in the past, personify recollections in the head. When they are kept in closed containers, this implies that their memories become less distinct or that Hamm tries to repress them (Sabine, *The Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett* 112).

To conclude, Beckett revolted against the realist theatre of Shaw and Arthur Miller and turned to Pirandello, Salvador Dali, Ionesco and Genet for inspiration to depict the traumatic experiences of the post World War humanity in his plays. He propounded the anti-theatrical devices to depict the corrosion of self of his protagonists.

Chapter 3

Stages of Gradual Corrosion of Self of Beckett's Protagonists: A Case Study of Lucky

Beckett was a prolific writer, he wrote many plays to articulate the traumatic experiences of modern man who had lived and suffered during the Second World War. After World War II, people were haunted by the scenes of wholesale death and destruction. Nuclear holocaust and the scenes of brutality of Auschwitz had shaken the faith of humanity. In the post World War II era, people looked helpless as the wounds were fresh. People started doubting the truth about religion as skepticism spread everywhere. The protagonists of Beckett were nihilistic and their outlook was pessimistic. *Waiting for Godot* depicted the mood of nihilism and despair of the post war. The play is packed with the themes of absurdity, existentialism, identity crisis, xenophobia, megalomania, despair and nihilism. Beckett is a modern playwright of the 21st century who uses all the anti-theatrical techniques; he changes plot, characterization, and final solution. The focus of the drama is non-action. Beckett evolved a new medium of communication to convey the absurdity of human life. He creates a mysterious universe peopled by tramps and misfits. His characters live in dreamlike vacuum, terrified by bewilderment and grief. Rosemary Pountney writes that "Beckett demands more from the audience than they have been accustomed to give" (Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows* 165).

Beckett begins his *Waiting for Godot* in a simple and natural manner. There is no activity on the stage. He introduces a "dying tree" symbolizing death and destruction. Vladimir and Estragon are two tramps who remain on the stage till the

end of the drama watching everything curiously and anxiously. Pozzo and Lucky appear again and again to comment on the absurdity of life and situation in which all are trapped. Interestingly they are wearing rags; they don't speak much and convey messages only through gestures. Their speeches are short and crisp, witty and sarcastic. Their dialogues are broken. In the present study, the main focus is on the analysis of Lucky whose case study gives a clear picture of the disintegration of western culture and society. He is an eye of the camera and through his eyes we can see the vision of life of all the protagonists of Beckett. The structure of *Waiting for Godot* is unique; it is quite unconventional and circular in nature. There is no beginning and no end, the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning. The plot of the drama is formless, chaotic and disorderly. Nothing changes and no development takes place. There are many interpretations of the Lucky-Pozzo relationship. In the Marxian sense, these two tramps express a master and a slave relationship. Lucky and Pozzo symbolize the traditional relationship between capital and labour. Pozzo is often described as a cruel God who torments the helpless Lucky. The post colonial critics of Beckett observe that Pozzo is a colonizer and Lucky is the colonized, the dialectical relationship between the capitalist and the proletariat is depicted by Beckett. Lucky has been given all the features of a dog; he enjoys playing tricks to please his master, Pozzo. Lucky leads the disgraceful life of a slave. Lucky has no personal respect or status and lives with a fractured identity. Pozzo has tied Lucky with a rope; his rope symbolizes his eternal slavery. His name, Lucky, is ironical; in reality he is leading a hellish life. His heavy bag symbolizes heavy burden and Lucky is always feeling the pain of heavy burden. His life is filled with pain and anguish but he suffers silently. He is treated like a dog and his

position is marginalized; abuses are hurled upon him but he silently suffers. He carries a whip and lives like a slave. He doesn't mind his humiliations. He doesn't want anyone to help him as he emerges as a humble slave to Pozzo. The wound on his neck symbolizes his age old slavery and persecution by the colonial forces. Lucky is sick and decadent in Act I. He becomes mute in Act II. He "thinks" but is quite irrational. He dances in a graceless manner just to please his master. He is an animal, trained to react to his master. The start of the play is quite sensational and enigmatic. Beckett introduces the strange world of *Waiting for Godot* with refrain "Let's go." "We can't." "Why not?" "We're waiting for godot." "Ah!" (Beckett, *Godot* 165). Vladimir and Estragon are tramps and have nothing significant to do with their lives. Charles R. Lyons observes that "the play has no structure; it begins and ends at the point and place where it started" (Lyons, *Two Projections* 6).

Michel Foucault's discursive theories help the readers to comprehend the plot of *Waiting for Godot*. Foucault begins his discursive theory stating thus: "In every society discourse is at once controlled, selected and organized" (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* 216). Foucault examines the "will to knowledge" as exercising "a sort of pressure, upon other forms of discourse, constraints which are product of our society" (Foucault 219). In *Waiting for Godot* the conversation is controlled and organized by Beckett. The characters are not free; they are trapped and live "under certain conditions" (Foucault 224). Hamm, Nell, Pozzo and Lucky are the victims of the absurdity of life and their conversation is an expression of their disintegrated personalities. The long speech of Lucky is particularly an example of his deranged mind.

Beckett was deeply influenced by the nihilistic ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and his key concepts such as “Will to Power”, the “Eternal Recurrence” dominate the plot structure of *Waiting for Godot*. He observes that all language is merely “metaphor” and every word is improvised by man to express his social and political lie. Lucky is a defeated lost tramp who has no hope to sustain his life, he is unable to harness the “Will to Power” for his growth. All his dialogues are broken and incoherent; his communication is fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. He is a restless tramp burdened with crushing boredom and existential angst, unable to embrace the Eternal Recurrence. He is haunted by the past and the future too is dismal for him as there is no hope of salvation in his life. Vivian Mercier observes that the theme of the play is “nothingness” as “nothingness happens twice” (Mercier, *Beckett* 52). It is the main irony in the play that Godot never appears though the tramps Vladimir and Estragon are constantly and anxiously seen waiting by the same tree for two days. There is no change in the development of the plot; it ends in the evening and in a place where it began. There is no action and no communication; nothing happens and nothing changes, the same deserted road and the barren tree haunt them endlessly. But the plot of the drama, if there is any, does convey the message of the corrosion of self of Lucky and his party, the loss of faith and the truth of life. In his essay *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, Nietzsche expresses his skepticism as he questions man’s ability to articulate the truth through language. He observes that all language is merely “metaphor” and every word is improvised by man to express his social and political lies. Language is thus deceiving and misleading, all dialogues of Vladimir, Estragon and Lucky are misleading and packed with lies about life and human existence. Nietzsche defines truth as:

A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and; anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished (Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* 5).

Beckett came under the influence of Nietzsche when he wrote dialogues for Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky. Beckett questions man's ability to communicate truth. Consider for instance the broodings of Vladimir:

Vladimir: "Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? (Beckett, *Godot* 157)

The mood of the play *Waiting for Godot* is of pessimism and despair. Nietzsche argued in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that Christianity is "a life denying" religion and man on this earth is always yearning for the dead God. Beckett depicts the mood of death and despair thus:

Vladimir: "Did you ever read the Bible?"

Estragon: "The Bible... [He reflects.] I must have taken a look at it."

Vladimir: "Do you remember the Gospels?"

Estragon: "I remember the maps of the Holy land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy" (Beckett, *Godot* 6).

The main message of Estragon is “Nothing to be done” at the opening of the play. Vladimir concurs but elaborates. “I’m beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I’ve tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven’t yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle” (Beckett, *Godot* 7). All the tramps make an attempt to commit suicide revealing their corrosion of self. Beckett depicts the neurotic state of the tramps who find life meaningless and in desperation they struggle to commit suicide. In Act I, suicide is thought as a distraction, which could relieve the characters from their psychic pressures. All the characters in *Waiting for Godot* believe that death is inevitable. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) Camus gave his philosophy of death and the transient nature of life. Beckett was greatly influenced by the ideas of Camus. Beckett believed that death is the only alternative left for human beings. The main characters think of suicide since their life is meaningless. Waiting for a long time by all the characters proves fruitless. They come to the conclusion that life is meaningless and the best solution of life is to end life. Lucky turns a neurotic wreck, Pozzo is sick and decadent and they feel that there’s nothing in their life worth living. Lucky is always carrying a rope with him symbolizing suicide. Vladimir and Estragon are trapped in a mysterious universe where love, peace, happiness are elusive things. They are living with dilemmas and uncertainties. The tree changes overnight and tells them the changeable nature of life. Estragon even forgets the name of Godot in his confusion. There is no problem with the world; Estragon and Vladimir think that they are engulfed in the absurd activities of the world. They are so much exasperated that they decide to leave:

Estragon: “Well, shall we go?”

Vladimir: “Yes, let’s go.” (They do not move.) (Beckett, *Godot* 86).

All the characters are pitted against the odd and absurd circumstances in *Waiting for Godot*. The boy is also confused as he forgets the earlier meeting and tells that Godot is not coming. The setting of the drama is quite unconventional. There is no active life; the two tramps are found on a deserted road engaged in endless talking about meaningless things of life. They have no purpose of life and are the victims of psychological torture of waiting. The scenery is arid and dreary; no greenery but a single bare tree. The historical background of both Pozzo and Didi is very funny. Interestingly for fifty years they have been intimate friends and are now waiting for Godot. Beckett has skillfully created the metaphor to depict the absurdity of human condition. Pozzo and Didi live in the contemporary wasteland where man is cruel to man. Didi is wearing a worn suit jacket that symbolizes his lost and disintegrated self. The theme of the corrosion of self begins with the opening fruitless, absurd and incoherent speeches of Pozzo and Didi. Pozzo is a big man in boots representing the cruel tribal society. His whip symbolizes his brutal force and the power to dominate the slaves. Ruby Cohn observes that Beckett's characters are the victims of time. Beckett doesn't make them caricatures but are normal human beings in the grip of the absurdity of life. The theme of the play is conveyed through their struggles for existence in a callous world where there are no values. Beckett has depicted human frailty; cruelty, power and misery in a realistic style. Time makes them deformed and impotent and all their life is spent "romancing with death". No wonder, Vladimir, Lucky, Pozzo, Estragon, Nell, Clov desperately struggle to fill their void indulging into the frivolities of life; Estragon's struggle with his shoe is an example of this degrading attitude. At the very outset of the drama we observe the fruitless struggle of Vladimir: "All my life I've tried to put it

from me... you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle" (Beckett, *Godot* 2). He is fed up with the routine of life as he cries out in despair that "boots must be taken off every day. I'm tired telling you that. Why don't you listen to me?"(4). The audience feels a sense of pity and belongingness with the two homeless wanderers, who when fed up with their endless waiting, contemplate committing suicide:

Vladimir: "What do we do now?"

Estragon: "Wait."

Vladimir: "Yes, but while waiting."

Estragon: "What about hanging ourselves?" (Beckett, *Godot* 9).

Both the tramps change action into non-action. Vladimir says: "Don't let's do anything. It's safer" (20). The tramps like the passive and inactive life as all activity is meaningless for them. They are waiting for Godot in a religious manner:

Vladimir: "That he'd see."

Estragon: "That he couldn't promise anything."

Vladimir: "That he'd have to think it over" (21).

Vladimir's quest is for waiting because he feels he is doing what Godot expects him to do: "To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea!"(26). Vladimir and Estragon are speaking on a roadside near a bare tree which is empty of people. This speech does not lead to anything or tell anything. They are waiting for the stranger, Godot, to come, night after night, hoping to find the salvation by his coming, but he never comes.

Lucky-Pozzo relationship in the drama depicts the incessant nature of futile human struggle. Lucky's place in *Waiting for Godot* forms the core of the drama. He is a psychological wreck and his name is also somewhat elusive. Beckett makes it clear that he has no expectations in life. The entrance of Pozzo and Lucky into the drama adds new dimensions to the plot. Lucky gives a hard kick to Estragon in the First Act. All the characters seem to live in hell. In the First Act, Lucky gives a long speech packed with absurdities and ambiguities of human existence. Lucky makes the following declaration:

Lucky: "Given the existence...of a personal God. Outside time... who...loves us dearly...And suffers...with those who...are...plunged in torment...it is established...Beyond all doubt...that man..."
(Beckett, *Godot* 20).

Pozzo and Lucky are representatives of the modern man afflicted with the neurotic tensions of life. Pozzo and Lucky represent the collapse of human civilization. Both the tramps visualize the primitive society as they are tied with the master and slave bonding. Pozzo is depicted as the old feudal lord enslaving and oppressing Lucky. He is powerful like a rich primitive lord who delights in his sensual delights and his wealth. The tramps live in a disorderly world where everything is in flux. Pozzo thinks that Lucky is a real genius who taught him the eternal values of "beauty, grace and truth". But Lucky is now a puppet who dances and sings at the command of Pozzo. Lucky is a source of entertainment to Pozzo, capable of giving his master joy, all type of help and thoughtful ideas. But now he is "killing" Pozzo. The role changes as Lucky become Pozzo's tormentor; he reminds

Pozzo of the reality of human existence. Lucky's great speech terrifies all as he foretells the extinction of the world.

Beckett has taken special pains to portray the character of Pozzo; he is a caricature of God, the absolute emperor. He represents the cruel establishment of tribal nature. He is an egoist, self-centred, fond of hearing his own voice. His greatest concern is his dignity as Lucky is always carrying his stool to serve him. He feels no pity for anyone else though he knows that the end of each man is inevitable: "One day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die" (Beckett, *Godot* 155). He is in a fit of disgust when he tramples on Lucky's hat. He makes a declaration that: "There's an end to his thinking!" He exhibits his primitive cruelty before the Second Act of the drama. Pozzo is punished for his cruelty to Lucky. He becomes blind at the end of the drama as he explains that "I woke up one day as blind as Fortune" (78). In the later part of the drama, Pozzo loses his memory. He looks confused and disoriented. He is ignorant of the circumstances in which he became blind. In fact Pozzo has entered into the third phase of hypomanic dementia: Carlson Goodwin in *The Neuropsychiatry of Limbic and Sub-cortical Disorders* (1983) observes thus:

In dementia, hallucinations and idiosyncratic delusions are common in patients. There may be disorientation in time and place as the victim forgets everything. His language is not normal in state of mania, there is disturbance in his speech patterns there is a disturbance of normal conversational progression. He repeats words and phrases (Goodwin, 244).

The fit of aphasia is very common in the life of Lucky who emerges as a borderline protagonist. Lucky's famous monologue in Act I has excited great interest among the critics. He begins his thinking pattern and seriously contemplates over the absurd situation of human existence. Lucky begins his historical speech in a natural manner using simple but ambiguous language. Pozzo is overwhelmed by the mood of dejection and depression when he makes his long speech. He is visibly upset and agitated as his long speech reflects his disoriented mind. Pozzo was a tribal ruler but he felt his power was being lost and very soon he would turn blind and Lucky would be leading him. Lucky's speech symbolizes the transfer of power from Pozzo. The last part of the speech finally explodes in a monologue reflecting his dementia.

Lucky becomes active when he wears the hat. On wearing the hat, he is in a commanding situation and becomes thoughtful and energetic. The monologue is long, rambling word salad, touching on all the uncertainties and absurdities of life. He gives a running commentary on the contemporary moral and spiritual malaise. His long speech comes to an end when Vladimir takes the hat back. Lucky is very critical of the callous nature of God as he talks about man's helplessness against the irrevocable forces of God and Nature. His speech in Act I is loaded with idiotic words and phrases. The main impact of the speech is "nonsense" as it depicts his neurotic perversion and the loss of sanity. He emerges as a borderline character, his speech is only absurd, it argues for absurdity. Once upon a time Lucky had taught Pozzo "beautiful" things; in Act II he becomes completely dumb. The speech depicts his corrosion of self and as the aphasia grows more pronounced. Lucky's speech has three parts; in each part the psychic pressures are intensified. As the speech progresses the imagery becomes subtle and absurd. Lucky blabbers about death,

decline and pathos in a broken and nonsensical language. In part I, the theme is clear as Lucky talks about the death of man. Part I deals with the decline and demise of God, and II with the disintegration of the world. Lucky's long speech is based on the metaphysical theme that man "wastes and pines" (Beckett, *Godot* 39). Beckett uses the slang 'knook' to explain that "what is terrible is to have thought" (57). His fit of aphasia brings diseased memories on the surface resulting into fragmented discourse. Estragon thinks that Lucky is on his wit's end as "Nothing to be done" (8). Lucky is known to "shrink and dwindle" (Beckett, *Godot* 39) and his skull "to shrink and waste" (40). It is pertinent to note that Lucky is depicted by Beckett as a victim of Parkinson's disease. Beckett has depicted the progression of his loss of his rational faculties and the debilitating course step by step. Its climax reaches the monologue of Lucky in Act One. Lucky emerges in the drama as a tragic figure, the victim of the cruelty of Pozzo. Narinder Kapur (1988) has also observed that a neurotic person like Lucky has problems of "memory disorders" (Kapur, *Memory Disorders in Clinical Practice* 128). Critics have investigated four aspects of the speech of Lucky. His first part describes the nature of an impersonal and callous God. The second part asserts that man "wastes and pines", and the third mourns an inhospitable earth. The last part is focused on the theme that man's corrosion of self is inevitable in this absurd world. Richard N. Coe in his book *Beckett* (1964) comments on the nature of Lucky's speech thus:

Lucky's great monologue in *Godot* is the most reliable outburst of the traumatic experience of a young man of modern age haunted by death and destruction of the Post World War I. From the psychiatrist's point of view, his speech is loaded with the images of disorientation of mind and the reflection of his corrosion of self (Coe, *Beckett* 50).

It is evident from Lucky's speech and behaviour that he is deeply depressed and suffers from memory impairment. Beckett is serious about Lucky's age and his enlarged goitre. His physical ailments impair his memory. He suffers from dementia and aphasia. Paine is of the opinion that Beckett portrays in Lucky "the body as the mind's curse demonstrating the numerous physical sufferings his characters endure but [making] the characters strangely unmoved by their own pain or mutilation" (Paine, *Motives and Modernism* 12-13). No wonder, Lucky does not remember what he said earlier. Knowlson also mentions the ailments of Lucky. "His bulging eyes and goitre bring his psychic depression and result into his loss of memory" (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 47). His long speech is loaded with the symptoms of aphasia: "of hesitations, fillers, substitutions, repetitions, circumlocutions and tangents" (Knowlson 47). Barnard observes that:

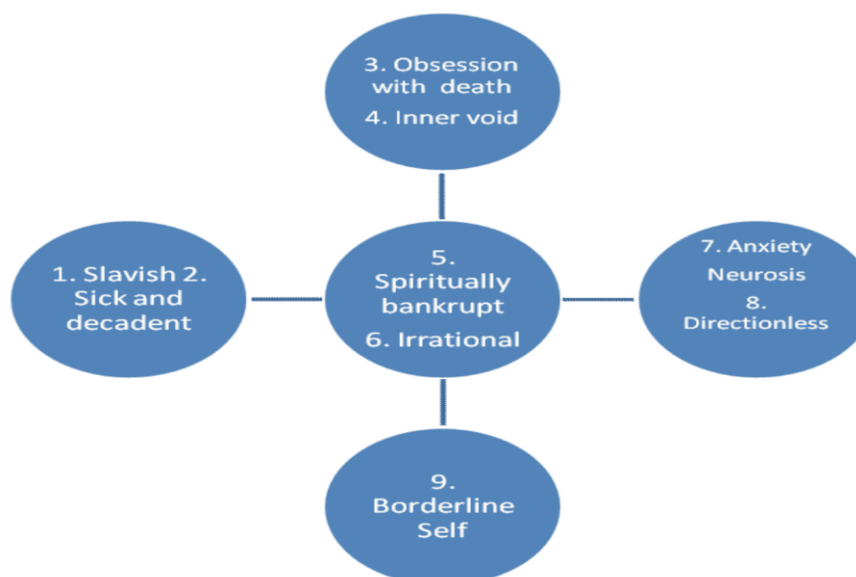
Lucky's long speech reveals the characteristics of schizophrenic speech disorders, he is repetitive, boring, disgusting, speaks in broken and disruptive style. There is no coherence and order; he expresses the volcano of his pent up feelings in long unending phrases and sentences. By the end of his speech Lucky is raving (Barnard, *Samuel Beckett: A New Approach* 96).

Paine is of the opinion that Beckett has depicted Lucky as a sick and ailing tramp; his "multiple physical sufferings symbolize his corrosion of self" (Paine, *Motives and Modernism* 12-13). His speech is slow to begin with but as he continues, his speeches become like gun-fire. Vladimir's observation that "Thinking is not the worst . . . What is terrible is to have thought" (Beckett, *Godot* 57) is true of Lucky's poignant performance. Esslin observes that Lucky gives the audience a

“wild, schizophrenic “word salad” (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 34). Lawrence Graver notes that in his first performance of the play at the Schiller Theater (1975) he started with the speech of Lucky. Beckett told the audience that the ‘threads and themes’ of the play “are being gathered together” (Beckett, *Godot* 49). Lucky’s soliloquy is packed with classical allusions and distorted versions of ordinary words and slangs. He uses “Belcher” for “belch”, “Fartov” for “fart”, and “Testew” for “testes”. He uses crude words to describe normal human functions. They indicate his disintegrating mind and corrosion of self. At the end of his speech, Lucky grows weary and exasperated as he collapses:

“I resume the skull to shrink and waste and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis on the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the labours abandoned ...” (Beckett, *Godot* 40).

Following is the Graph of Corrosion of Self of Lucky:



Lucky's introduction remains dangling, he fails to develop an argument, and he is unable to draw any conclusion. To conclude, Lucky suffers from the following symptoms of the corrosion of self:

- 1) He is a tramp and a slave and has no individual existence, no dignity and no status in the society.
- 2) There is an inner void in him; his long monologue expresses his depression and neurosis.
- 3) Lucky looks confused and directionless, his waiting does not lead him to anywhere, he gets stressed as he finds life meaningless.
- 4) Lucky lives in darkness throughout the play, there is no awareness and no growth in him. He has nothing to give to humanity and his project of waiting ends in fiasco.
- 5) Lucky is nihilistic as he suffers from spiritual bankruptcy.
- 6) Lucky degenerates into a borderline character, the cycle of corrosion of self is complete in his case; he suffers from dementia and aphasia.

Knowlson observes that Pozzo and Lucky are one man. The duality of body and mind is represented by Pozzo and Lucky. The material and spiritual aspects of life are symbolized by them. Estragon and Vladimir may be regarded as one man. The oneness of Pozzo and Lucky proves destructive and degrading to both of them. Pozzo has a negative and destructive impact on others. Pozzo and Lucky belong to a primitive tribal feudal society governed by orthodox ideas. Pozzo is cruel and violent; his human degradation is highlighted in the text by Beckett. Knowlson finds the relationship between the colonial and the colonized in relationship between Lucky and Pozzo. They are tied to each other by external forces. Lucky looks sad

and dejected being insulted and tortured by Pozzo. Lucky and Pozzo are tied to a rope forever and are leading a hellish existence. The role of Pozzo is that of the sadist master while Lucky is the poor tortured, the “Other”.

Pozzo and Lucky are tied together and they are inter-dependent. They are the real tramps; sick and derelicts. They are trapped in an absurd situation of life and are pitted against the absurdity of life. Lucky is a traditional slave to Pozzo. He is carrying a huge burden on his neck and looks like a sick animal. Lucky has to carry a huge burden symbolizing his miserable slavery. Lucky is satisfied with his self-imposed suffering because he does not want to be sold in the fair. Pozzo explains the situation in his own way thus:

“He imagines that when I see how well he carries I’ll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity.....He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I’ll regret my decision” (Beckett, *Godot* 44).

In the Second Act, Pozzo gives vent to his inner traumatic self-imposed sufferings. His revelation disturbs Lucky. Pozzo cannot live without Lucky and so is the case of Lucky who loves to serve his master; his identity is through his love-hate relationship with Pozzo. Both try to escape from the existential panic of life. Lucky is free because his life is planned and regulated by Pozzo. The safety and security of Lucky lies in his bond with Pozzo, though their relationship is sadomasochistic. Lucky has sacrificed everything to continue the mutual relationship with Pozzo though he has suffered enormous pain. Lucky does recover his senses gradually at the feel of his bag. In the Second Act, Lucky is full of predictions about the future of human civilization. Pozzo is in a different form; he has become blind and needs help. It is the time for Lucky to become his master. There is total transformation in

the situation as the rope becomes shorter to felicitate Pozzo to follow Lucky easily. Lucky has grown mature and has learnt a lot about the metaphysical despair of human beings. Knowlson observes that Pozzo and Lucky relationship represents Christ and mankind. In fact the tramps are re-acting the mythical scene of the Redemption. The tramps are pitted against harsh circumstances; they are bound to wait for the mysterious Godot. Pozzo and Lucky are ordinary human beings; the victims of human absurdity. Pozzo symbolizes the physical powers and Lucky represents the spiritual vision of life. The blindness of Pozzo is symbolical of the transient nature of human power. Most of the characters in the play talk endlessly; they deliberate upon the routine and boring activities of life. Lucky is persecuted and tortured by Pozzo but Lucky endures all sufferings like a stoic. He suffers willingly and without hesitation. A long rope ties him to Pozzo in the First Act but in the Second Act, the rope is short and Pozzo has become blind. The entire humanity is in trouble as their sufferings define the nature of hell in which they live. Pozzo becomes blind as he complains of a weak lung and goes blind. Lucky holds the bag; he puts down a stool for Pozzo who is his master. Pozzo looks quite excited as he is helped by his slave, Lucky. Pozzo is a slave driver; dominating and commanding. Lucky uses a satirical tone as he says: "I am liberal. It's my nature" (Beckett, *Godot* 58). Pozzo is a slave driver and Lucky is his blind follower. Lucky is satisfied with his self-imposed suffering because he does not want to be sold in the fair. Lucky bleeds at the end, his blood symbolizes self-renunciation as he expresses in his monologue. Lucky gets new enlightenment after he makes his speech as he feels relieved from the psychic pressures. Vladimir is quite upset to find Lucky mastering the situation. He expresses his satisfaction thus:

“We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for ... waiting. All evening we have struggled, unassisted. Now it’s over. It’s already tomorrow” (Beckett, *Godot* 128).

The hat scene in *Waiting for Godot* is very significant; it has symbolical significance in the drama. The hat is exchanged among the characters. Lucky wears the hat and appears a grotesque figure of a suffering Christ-figure. He suggests role-playing to Pozzo: “We could play as Pozzo and Lucky... I’ll do Lucky, you do Pozzo” (119). The role playing is mythical and the second coming of Pozzo symbolizes the coming of Christ. Lucky and all tramps look confused as they are expecting the arrival of Godot. The triumphant shout of Vladimir is quite sensational and dramatic. Taking Pozzo as Godot, Vladimir shouts: “It’s Godot! At last! Gogo!” (121). The tramps are not sure about the name of Pozzo:

Estragon: “His name is Godot?”

Vladimir: “I think so.”

Estragon: “Fancy that ...” (14)

Godot’s absence is once more revealed when Estragon asks:

Estragon: “Is that him?”

Vladimir: “Who?”

Estragon. (*trying to remember the name*) “... Er”

Vladimir: “Godot?”

Estragon: “Yes.”

Pozzo: “Present myself: Pozzo.”

Vladimir (*to Estragon*): “Not at all!”

Estragon: “He said Godot.”

Vladimir: “Not at all” (Beckett, *Godot* 15).

All the tramps in the drama are tied together. They live in a godless and callous world where hope is elusive and happiness delusive. Indeed they are the fragmented and disoriented individuals. The myth of reverberated Godot integrates all the tramps as they are trapped in a similar situation demanding unity from them. Beckett creates an illusion to help the tramps to reach a greater self: "We're in no danger of thinking any more" (64). Vladimir realizes at the end of the play that he has been dreaming and he must confront the reality of life. Godot's messenger appears and once all of them are thrown into a world of false illusions. Estragon gets exasperated as he throws away his boots in desperation. He declares that he will continue playing the role of the suffering figure of Christ. The tramps have no option but to wait. Beckett has used the metaphor of waiting to dramatize the despair of the tramps. Estragon expresses his nihilistic views thus: "We're all born mad" (135). Lamont finds relevance in waiting as he argues that man can only wait and wait in the contemporary absurd world. Vladimir's plan puts new courage in Lucky as he says:

"Wait...we embraced...we were happy...happy...what do we do now that we're happy...go on waiting...waiting...let me think...it's coming...go on waiting...now that we're happy...let me see...ah! The tree!" (Beckett, *Godot* 104).

James Knowlson records that Beckett suffered from depression. He suffered from acute depression and had to be hospitalized. He had painful sessions with Bion that lasted many days. Beckett had painful experiences of depression and psychosomatic symptoms. He had experienced the trauma and loss of memory. Knowlson affirms that Beckett had read *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* of

Robert S. Woodworth. He took keen interest in the various aspects of psychology to gain awareness about the psychic ailments that grip man. Beckett read the works of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and Carl Gustav Jung. James Knowlson recorded that when Beckett was a school boy, he came under the influence of Freud and psychoanalysis. Beckett was greatly fascinated by Karin Stephen's book *The Wish to Fall Ill: A Study of Psychoanalysis and Medicine*. (1933) He often kept a copy of the book with him. He got a thorough understanding of abnormal psychology. Wilhem Stekel published *Psychoanalysis and Suggestion Theory*, (1923) and explored that "the neurotic lacks the will to get well" (Stephen, *The Wish to Fall Ill* 6). No wonder the characters of Beckett are sick and damaged struggling in vain since they don't find any purpose in life. They are leading a life in death. Like the characters of Virginia Woolf they are living in "moments of being". They suffer from physical and psychological ailments and are no longer capable to achieve any goal in life. Beckett took keen interest in human psychology to portray a world full of ugliness and restlessness. Beckett has painted a world of misfits who suffer from the psychological ailments of neurosis and depression. They are imbecile and flop.

Dr. Karen Horney observes that the major symptom of neurosis is forgetfulness in a character, his absentmindedness diminishes the power of consciousness. All the tramps of *Waiting for Godot* have poor power of reasoning and memory. They repeat mistakes and don't remember what they did in the past. In their futile quest the tramps resort to non action as Vladimir says: "Don't let's do anything. It's safer" (Beckett, *Godot* 20). They prefer to be inactive and become the victim of inertia. Vladimir is satisfied with his art of waiting alone. Vladimir thinks that Godot is invisible and he can see them waiting from above: "That he'd see,"

“That he couldn’t promise anything” and finally “That he’d have to think it over” (Beckett, *Godot* 21). Consider for instance the abnormal behaviour of Lucky who dances to a crawl with his mouth open. His long speech is loaded with academic nonsense:

“as a result of the labours left unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of Anthropopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labours of men...” (65)

Lucky has experiences that man is on the decline. His use of the phrase “Wastes and Pines” (39) suggests physical weakness and his mental degradation. He is a spiritual wreck, a neurotic being, the victim of psychic pressures and tensions. Lucky makes a commentary on the nature of God and the degeneration of our species. When Lucky returns for the second time on the stage he discovers that his master is a blind, broken old man. Lucky emerges as a willing dumb slave. He remains silent in spite of the humiliations heaped on him by his master, Pozzo. All the tramps are burdened with the consciousness of time. Beckett’s world is cruel, godless and directionless. It is very hard to live in this callous world. The tramps of Beckett die before their death because of poor management of time. Beckett employs the destructive nature of time to remind the tramps that life is uncertain and unpredictable and death is inevitable. All characters are sick and the victims of physical and psychological ailments. Estragon is a victim of Alzheimer’s disease. Pozzo and Lucky are suffering from cerebral malfunctions. David H. Hesla opines that: “Mercifully, Didi and Gogo have largely spared the burden of the past, for their memories are so defective that little of earlier two remains to them.... Their

existence is extemporaneous” (Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos* 133). Later, Didi says: “We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadener. ... of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on” (Beckett, *Godot* 157).

Lucky knows that the world is nearing destruction. Lucky is the most unlucky person; he is maltreated by Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*. His heavy luggage symbolizes the heavy burden of humanity. The rope tied to his neck is symbolic of humanity’s eternal sufferings. Lucky does not put down his luggage. Pozzo replies that “he wants to impress me so that I can keep him” (31). Lucky knows that time will kill all and mankind has no hope and no future. Lucky indicates that the time is near when there will be only skulls and stones except human beings. In *Waiting for Godot*, Lucky appears several times in the drama. Lucky depends on Pozzo for survival. The interesting part in their relationship is the mutual dependence between Pozzo and Lucky. Lucky is fiercely loyal to Pozzo in spite of his abuses and humiliations. At one point when Estragon tries to help Lucky, Lucky resents the help of other people. He has one very long speech in Act One, but otherwise does not talk much.

Lucky and Pozzo are two important protagonists who suffer corrosion of self. Pozzo becomes blind to the reality of life and lives in a mysterious universe without hope and faith in life. His master is now blind and feeble. Lucky feels upset and becomes mute in the rest of the plot. Lucky becomes powerful and gets a chance to dominate Pozzo since he has gone blind. He could escape from the cruelties of Pozzo but ironically he is a dedicated slave to Pozzo and doesn’t think of running away. In fact, Lucky still helps Pozzo as he gives him his whip. He also carries the

bags. The situation has changed but Lucky is still devoted to Pozzo. Pozzo's hatred for Lucky is limitless. Lucky has no freedom and independent voice. Pozzo exploits Lucky and puts his entire burden on him. Pozzo's existence is only with his slave, Lucky. They are bound together by a rope. They remain united and in no time they are separated. Pozzo is blind and weak. He has lost all the old glamour and he is bound to depend on his slave, Lucky. In this situation, his slave must care for him.

Beckett deals with the metaphysical issues of God and religion and their relationship to men. The main focus of Beckett is on the all pervasive anxiety of contemporary people. In post World War II era, human beings were baffled with the metaphysical questions about the existence of God and his power. They often raised the question of His existence during the Holocaust. Millions of innocent lives were brutally ruined but no God appeared to save them. People expressed their distrust for the salvation and peace of God and religion. Humanity desperately searched for such answers but found no meaning either in scriptures or in any theology. People didn't get the answers from the scriptures, so they experienced an overwhelming state of despair. The absurd drama was the product of the moral and spiritual decadence of the age. Beckett created characters as representative of the spiritual malaise of the age. Estragon has been given all the physical sufferings while Vladimir has been given all the mental and emotional ailments. Beckett gives physical awareness to Estragon. He can neither think nor act. He feels mentally and physically tired. Vladimir thinks like a philosopher. He feels mentally tired. Estragon is short of memory as he hardly is aware of his past as he says: "That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or never forget" (Beckett, *Godot* 45). He forgets the bones, the kick; even he cannot recollect Pozzo and Lucky. He also does not identify the place.

But Vladimir does recognize the place, persons and his past. The play *Waiting for Godot* builds an atmosphere of existential angst and hopelessness. Beckett's characters are rootless, homeless and alienated.

The universe of Beckett is on the decline and disintegration, humanity is at the crossroads, chaos of existence is a certainty, death and destruction are inescapable realities. Lucky's long soliloquy begins in an incoherent manner, dissolves into rambling intellect and only ends when an agitated Vladimir rips off Lucky's hat. Beckett struggled to evolve a new medium and style of writing which would convey the shapelessness of life. Hence, he had to give 'form' to formlessness through a language which is also formless and chaotic. Beckett believes that drama and fiction can only articulate the chaos and mess of this derelict world. Knowlson records that Beckett was inspired with the thoughts of Beckett that 'human beings have a pre-birth nostalgia to return to the mineral state' (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 29). Everything in Beckett's world appears to be in decline and his characters suffer corrosion of self. No wonder, the audience see characters in dustbins and urns; images of torsos; heads and mouths trapped in environments which lead them to sterility and deterioration. Beckett's use of language is to describe degeneration through words, which are themselves flawed. Speaking with Tom F. Driver (1961), Beckett observed thus:

I don't mean that the drama will not have any form; but I do believe that the modern man cannot be tied to the old conventions any more. Our age is different and new conventions, images and form are needed to dramatize the modern malaise. We will not have dramas of heroic action but of inaction expressing the psychological traumas

that afflict man. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former (Federman, *Journey into Chaos* 219).

It is found that the concept of “formal thought disorder” was first used by Emil Kraepelin (1856–1926) and Eugen Bleuler (1807–1939). Kraepelin was the first German psychiatrist who identified schizophrenia as an “ontological entity”. He invented the concept of “dementia praecox”. Both the famous psychiatrists used the concept of “formal thought disorder” in their clinical analysis. Kraepelin made distinctions between schizophrenia and maniac depressive psychosis that remain valid today. He considered “derailment” as a fundamental symptom of schizophrenic speech disorder. Neologisms or made up words result in formulaic and pompous speech. The long soliloquy of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot* is an example of this type of “derailment”. All the protagonists in the play are uncertain about who they are and how they got there. The world depicted in the play is short of certainties. The ‘self’ itself is a mystery. The gradual corrosion of ‘self’ is depicted very efficiently. The characters are depicted to be thought-blocked and are bound to fail to express themselves through conversation. Lucky’s long and incoherent speech exemplifies the flight of ideas. The characters neglect their personal hygiene and grooming and there are periods of silence and inertia reflecting their loss of sense of reality.

Corrosion of self is a psychosocial state or condition of disorientation and role of confusion in the life of man resulting from conflicting internal and external experiences, pressures, and expectations that often produce acute anxiety. Beckett’s characters are wandering in the modern wasteland of post World War II; the landscape is bleak and arid. They are homeless on a planet where nothing grows.

They are tramps and refugees fit to live in trash bins. They are misfits and cripples struggling in life in a godless universe. They are hardly able to speak, as they are pitted against harsh and inhuman circumstances. So the characters are depicted as such victims that they dare not even laugh. Henry Hewes is right when he describes the condition of the protagonists of Samuel Beckett thus: “He merely waits to be physically or psychologically emasculated, invites his doom with a self-immolation passivity that masochistically converts pain into pleasure” (Hewes, *Who’s Afraid of Big Bad Broadway?* 60).

Beckett evolved his own speech mechanism to articulate the psychological traumas of the protagonists. Beckett and Albee made experiments in language; they were the pioneers of the modern drama. Beckett evolved uncanny and unconventional language, phrases, words and clichés. The dialogues are short and crisp; the characters use ambiguous language. There are pauses and breaks and words parody the activities. Beckett ridiculed stereotyped speech patterns and innovated new phrases and images to articulate the agonizing experience and despair of his protagonists. Beckett and Albee are not concerned about what is being actually said. The barren wasteland in which *Waiting for Godot* takes place can be seen as a metaphor for the corrosion of self of the protagonist. He borrowed from the theories and the techniques of nihilism and absurdum. His protagonists confront a meaningless existence; religion, myth and truth are no longer helpful to them as them. The message of *Endgame* is given thus: ‘The end is in the beginning and yet you go on’ (*Endgame* 126). As Knowlson says, “Beckett conveys a view of life which sees birth as intimately connected with suffering and death and which sees life as a painful road to be trod” (Knowlson, *Damned to Fame* 2).

Beckett uses the imagery of death, decline and physical diseases to articulate schizophrenic frenzy of the protagonists. All the protagonists in *Waiting for Godot* are fragile, sick and decadent. Estragon suffers from his aching sore feet. Vladimir suffers from painful urinary infection. The physical disabilities of the protagonists symbolize the various spiritual disabilities of the post World War II age. Lucky and Pozzo give surprise to the audience by their sensational entrance. Beckett uses circus imagery to suggest hollowness, schizophrenic frenzy of Lucky and his team. Indeed, Pozzo and Lucky are on a journey leading them to nowhere. One talks, the other says nothing. Estragon comments on the sordidness of human existence thus: "We are all born mad. Some remain so" (Beckett, *Godot* 135). Lucky suffers from schizophrenic frenzy; he is seen babbling his way to silence. His long soliloquy in Act I is loaded with unpunctuated, idiotic words and phrases full of nonsense. Lucky's meaningless speech reinforces the themes of death and decay. Lucky is on the road to decline as he argues for absurdity and nonsense. As the speech progresses, the process of eternal silence also begins. Lucky, like the white-bearded God speaks of his mental retardation. His speech catches him in the process of going silent. It symbolizes his inevitable corrosion of self. The speech itself deteriorates internally as the aphasia grows more pronounced. The speech of Lucky has multiple layers and it can be analyzed in a psychoanalytical manner. There are contradictory statements, repetitions, interjections, incoherent ideas expressed in broken unconventional words and phrases symbolical of his gradual corrosion of self. The rich poetic imagery suggests death, decline and pathos. Lucky refers to Descartes and Spinoza and talks about the decline and demise of God. He discusses the process of disintegration of the world in ambiguous words since he is suffering from

neurotic depression and nausea. Beckett's early treatment of this influence for deterioration is clearly illustrated in his essay on Proust:

There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday. There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us. The mood is of no importance. Deformation has taken place (Beckett, *Proust* 13).

It is evident that Beckett's characters often idealize memories and, in some instances, they feel compelled to invent memories in an attempt, perhaps, to eradicate the pain of past experience and therefore reduce the suffering of present existence. It is clear that memory serves as a negative influence, as the characters cannot escape the past, nor alleviate the pain attributed to it. The detrimental effect which memory produces therefore influences the characters' well-being, and forces one to acknowledge it as a representation of decay within the mind. There is no dawn in the life of Lucky; he lives in a world of darkness and gloom. Beckett has depicted the landscape of death and decay, excavating the turbulent landscape of the mind. Plagued with isolation and memory loss, Lucky's life is reduced to a ghostly manifestation, burdened by mental turmoil and subjected to spiritual attrition. Lucky, Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon are thrown into a valueless world. Their only purpose is to fill the empty void in which they find themselves with something to do while they wait. For instance, they try on boots.

Vladimir: "What about trying them?"

Estragon: "I've tried everything."

Vladimir: “No, I mean the boots.”

Estragon: “Would that be a good thing?”

Vladimir: “It’d pass the time.” [*Estragon hesitates.*] “I assure you, it’d be an occupation” (Beckett, *Godot* 59).

The barren scenery and claustrophobic atmosphere depict their mental paralysis. They are trapped in an absurd situation to wait only. All the tramps lead a purposeless life; they are idlers and try to pass the time indulging into the frivolities of life. They are haunted by the consciousness of void. Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* is loaded with the images of pessimism. Nietzsche argued that Christianity was a “life-denying” religion. Beckett depicts the mood of melancholy of the post-Christian world. He expresses the anguish of people who think of the dead God. While Nietzsche argued that Christianity was a “life-denying” religion and that casting it aside was the first step in adopting an outlook of life-affirmation, the post-Christian world of Beckett’s play is characterized primarily by a bleak lifelessness and a melancholy yearning for the dead God, or some other form of salvation.

Vladimir: “Did you ever read the Bible?”

Estragon: “The Bible...” [*He reflects.*] “I must have taken a look at it.”

Vladimir: “Do you remember the Gospels?”

Estragon: “I remember the maps of the Holy land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That’s where we’ll go, I used to say, that’s where we’ll go for our honeymoon. We’ll swim. We’ll be happy” (Beckett, *Godot* 6).

It is found that Lucky emerges as a borderline personality at the end of the play. The present study investigates that Lucky is a detached type; he leads a directionless life mostly depending upon his ring master who enslaves him. He becomes numb to his emotional experiences and feelings. The present research relied on the symptoms of borderline established in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV, APA, 1994) and discussed and analyzed by Karen Horney in her book *Our Inner Conflict: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (1993). The chief traits that constitute disorders are aggressive nature, loss of interest in life and its activities, anxiety, nihilistic attitude, depression and alienation. All these symptoms are found in abundance in the personality of Lucky. He suffers from paranoid personality disorders because of his suspiciousness, mistrust, irritability and emotional coldness.

Insanity has often been regarded by society as an inferior mental state. Michel Foucault suggests that “We have now got in the habit of perceiving in madness a fall into determinism where all forms of liberty are gradually suppressed” (Foucault, *On Knowledge and Power* 83). However, Beckett offers an inversion of the general perception of madness, as he pushes the boundaries of the mind and illustrates that sanity and insanity are not polar opposites, but rather different aspects of the consciousness. In Lucky’s case the line between the rational and the unsound state of mind becomes effaced. Beckett suggests that freedom is only to be located in the insane mind, where the consciousness is not restricted by conforming to society, and the mind becomes freed from the ‘confines’ of sanity. Beckett’s play details the convoluted workings of his characters’ mental faculties. Lucky’s case study prompts the audience to re-conceptualize the definition of the sane and insane.

As the plot progresses, Lucky becomes a patient of mental fatigue. Beckett visualizes the “diseased” psyche of Lucky as the stage of corrosion of self develops. The drama ultimately becomes internal, as Beckett excavates the landscape of his mind in an attempt to portray the corrosion of self, as through his mental processes Lucky undergoes an uncompromising self-examination. Miss Lillian Feder’s words substantiate this idea: “Inappropriate, pathological guilt, for example, was among the most common symptoms of mental disturbance prevalent in Western civilization” (Feder, *Madness in Literature* 5). Lucky is crying in the wilderness enduring a mental crucifixion and a non-identity. The theme of denial is prevalent throughout the drama and the inability to acknowledge ‘I’ may be attributed to Lucky’s corrosion of self.

Erikson stresses that personal identity is “located at the crucial interface between the individual and society” (Erikson, *Stages of Psychological Development* 23). Personality formation is an interesting process in the life of an individual. Freud explored the neurotic symptoms taking roots from failure of repression. Freud argued that the repressed feelings disrupt the normal functioning of the individual. Otto Fenichel published his treatise on *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (1945). He argued that “attitudes” in a character reveal a reciprocal relationship between character traits and neurotic symptoms. Lucky is an important neurotic character in *Waiting for Godot* who delivers his long speech to articulate his neurotic obsession. The best example of this tendency is found in his endless verbal communication degenerating into endless silence. Lucky becomes a borderline as he invests his energy in fruitless ideas, incoherent thoughts narrating neurotic senseless episodes. Lucky suffers from dissociated ego because there is rupture in his

language, slowdown in intelligence, decline in perception, impairment in thought processes and defensive mechanism. Horney claimed that identity diffusion is often found in a borderline patient. It is easy to observe regressive and maladaptive behaviour in Lucky; his social exclusion and marginalization result into his identity diffusion.

The spiritual dejection of Lucky and other protagonists suggests that their position is, in fact, hopeless and they know that an escape from consciousness is unattainable. The impassive faces and toneless voices reflect the weariness of the characters and illustrate that they have become mentally conditioned to relate their stories without thought or reason. This mindless, repetitive narrative, over which they have little control, must eventually lead to mental instability, as the human mind cannot endure the monotony of repetition, coupled with the monotony of existence. R.D Laing in his book *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (1960) suggests that when an individual is insecure, such people “experience themselves as primarily split into a mind and a body. Usually they feel most closely identified with the “mind” (Laing, *The Divided Self* 65). Dr. Horney observes that a borderline has no clear perception of life as his vision is fluid. All the characters in *Waiting for Godot* don’t have a clear perception of life. They are nervous; inactive; baffled and bewildered. They are directionless and live in a fragmented valueless world. Vladimir and Estragon debate the situation endlessly, unable to come to a decision.

Vladimir: “Perhaps we should help him first.”

Estragon: “To do what?”

Vladimir: “To get up.”

Estragon: “He can’t get up?”

Vladimir: “He wants to get up.”

Estragon: “Then let him get up” (Beckett, *Godot* 68-69).

The tramps are only pitted to wait and only to wait. They are passing through a phase of timidity, uncertainty and physical exhaustion. Kathryn White in the second part of her latest book *Beckett and Decay* (2009) explores Beckett’s representation of the mind and how, similar to the body, it too is prone to deterioration. She argues that Beckett illustrates the Cartesian dualism of body and mind throughout the play *Waiting for Godot*. Just have a look at the following dialogue:

Vladimir : “One daren’t even laugh any more.”

Estragon: “Dreadful privation.”

Vladimir: “Merely smiles.” [He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.] “It’s not the same thing. Nothing to be done” (Beckett, *Godot* 25).

The critical examination of Lucky’s soliloquy reveals the implications of his loss of memory, his broken verbal communication depicting his mental weariness, the intellectual inability to comprehend life and the mystery of the universe. As the plot progresses, Lucky becomes a borderline since his corrosion of self is complete. The stages of Lucky’s insanity are explored in the following chapter to illustrate how Beckett re-conceptualizes mental disorders. The present study also investigates ‘the ebbing spirit’, examining the ‘spiritual’ element of existence, as opposed to the physical and mental components. But Vladimir and Estragon are held in stasis. As

they are suspended in waiting, their every attempt to reach the “ideal core of the onion” is denied to them and even if all their frantic attempts to peel away its successive layers were within their grasp, they would discover that there is in fact nothing there. They wait for the “Other”; they indeed incorporate the “Other” into themselves. Vladimir and Estragon adopt slave will by constituting themselves and their language as an object which substitutes for the “Other” (who is absent). All the events and the levels of consciousness in *Waiting for Godot* may be contained within this context. In this play, Beckett searches for the means of finding an image for the inner states of breakdown, disintegration, and decay.

Lucky is a typical modern protagonist grappling with the realities of human existence alone. He is sick and decadent without any hope of life or sense of purpose. Beckett’s Lucky is certainly the waste product of modern mercantile culture. His body is no better than a waste product destined for the disposal heap. Lucky’s speech is full of terror and horror as it foretells the extinction of man from the world. He exposes the myth of science and technology which will not help man in his march towards death and destruction. Lucky predicts the total annihilation of the planet of man. In *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, Beckett has created a world in which Godot never comes. The protagonists can only wait; they are buried up to the neck in sand or face down in the mud, a world which is devastated, post atomic, and so empty that even a solitary human being seems like a monstrous intrusion. Corrosion of self leads to neurosis, depression and negation of life. Vladimir and Estragon live in a void:

Estragon: “What exactly did we ask him for?”

Vladimir: “Were you not there?”

Estragon: “I can’t have been listening.”

Vladimir: “Oh...nothing very definite” (Beckett, *Godot* 10).

Through Ham too Beckett depicts the corrosion of self of a modern man in his play *Endgame*. Thus, the protagonists suffer the gradual corrosion of self; they are expelled from the stream of life. They are the victims of events which create the illusion of flux of time. Beckett highlights the static, unceasing and absurd world of absurdity. The audience feels a sense of pity and belongingness with the two homeless wanderers, who when fed up with their endless waiting, contemplate committing suicide:

Vladimir: “What do we do now?”

Estragon: “Wait.”

Vladimir: “Yes, but while waiting.”

Estragon: “What about hanging ourselves?” (Beckett, *Godot* 9).

In their struggle to escape from self, both Estragon and Vladimir become the victims of schizophrenic tendencies. It is a psychotic disorder; the product of impaired thinking, emotions and behaviour. Through Ham too, Beckett depicts the corrosion of self of the modern man in his play *Endgame* when he says:

“...One day you’ll be blind, like me. You’ll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, forever, like me.”

Clov is just passive and says: ... “It’s not certain...”

Hamm: “Well, you’ll lie down then, what the hell! Or you’ll come to a standstill, simply stop and stand still, the way you are now. One day you’ll say, I’m tired, I’ll stop. What does the attitude matter?” (Beckett, *Endgame* 109-110).

Generally, Vladimir and Estragon lose their ability to take care of personal needs and grooming. There is a disconnection between their thoughts and actions which further disintegrate personality and the result is agitation, unusual behaviour, and loss of touch with reality. The characters are shown to be suffering from delusions, hallucinations, disorganized and incoherent speech, and several emotional abnormalities which are the implications of their corrosion of self. Beckett evolved new techniques to articulate the bewilderment and confusion of the trapped protagonists.

Chapter 4

The Broken, Disintegrated Universe of Tennessee Williams: Drama of Corrosion of Self

Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams dominated the American stage for a pretty long time. Miller depicted the sufferings of middleclass people victimized by the growth of money culture and tough competition. Williams suffered from diphtheria and had a rather troubled childhood. Williams remained paralyzed for two years. His illness gave him a new experience of life and transported him into the illusive world of drama. Williams loved his mother very much who inspired him to read Shakespeare and Dickens. During his long illness Williams spent most of his time with his mother. His early experiences made Williams a serious pessimistic dramatist. The critics have called him a dramatist of frustration.

Tennessee Williams is known for his new feminism. He created lost, truncated women protagonists in his *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1959), and *The Night of Iguana* (1962). It is admitted that the orthodox societies treated women as secondary citizens. In the present chapter, the texts of Tennessee Williams are investigated to depict the marginalization of women. The history of feminism is quite interesting. The Marxist feminism deals with female economic oppression. The modern feminists like Elaine Showalter uncover the traumatic oppression of women by the patriarchal society. Gayatri Spivak talks about the marginalization of women. Williams dramatizes the plight of women in his famous plays *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *The Night of Iguana*. Williams turns to the old history

of the South with all the traditions and rituals that provides the “tragic history”. The setting of his plays is in the South and the women also belong to the South. In the plays of Williams, women are leading a lonely and desperate life. They are lonely, trapped, and desperate characters. Tennessee Williams has never denied his Southern heritage. Williams turned to the Old South for the plots, scenery, settings and the themes. In the 19th century the dramatists exploited the myth of the South and created a myth around the ante-bellum. The Old South was revived and the women characters were conceived imitating the myth of the Southern belle. The image of the Southern belle became an ideal for Tennessee Williams; he depicted the disintegration of the aristocratic society in his dramas.

The image of the Southern Belle has become a mythical figure for Tennessee Williams. He has explored almost every aspect of the Southern American society. In most of his plays, we find his obsession with the old past and its impact on his characters. Williams wrote plays depicting the sense of loss and frustration of the Southern women who were clinging to the past in spite of the total transformation of society. His plays are dominated by the tone of disintegration. There are three classes of his women characters. There are the Southern genteel ladies who are longing for the revival of the old past. They feel sick when they find the values of the old past declining. Then there are women who are aggressors. They are the survivors of old corrupt societies. Hovis firmly believes that the women of Williams are “strong, articulate and assertive” (Hovis, *Shakespeare's and Tennessee Williams' Women* 171). Signi Falk defines his Southern genteel lady “as a woman who is unable to harmonize the world of her dreams with reality” (Falk, *Modern Drama* 70). W.J Cash in *The Mind of the South* (1954) avers that the women of Williams are

relics of the dead tradition of elegance. They live in the world of illusions and lack the courage to confront reality. They belong to the mythical Cavalier Old South. Many of the women characters of Williams live in their illusions and still believe that the old South was glamorous.

Tennessee Williams became famous because of his creation of Blanche DuBois, Maggie the Cat and Amanda Wingfield. His achievement in the American theatre was sensational as the reviewers and critics highly eulogized Williams for his originality and life-like characters. All these women of Williams depict the dramatic vision of the playwright. The creation of all these women is inspired by his relatives and friends. His own sister, Rose, represented the sexually repressed Southern genteel lady. Women protagonists dominate all his plays. Tischler also observes that Tennessee Williams “created trapped and truncated women in his dramas” (Tischler, *Tennessee Williams* 513). The approach of Williams is psychological. There is always a conflict between body and soul. The sexual repression, sexual drives and sexual intimacy with the strangers is the main theme of most of his plays. Blanche, Alma and even Laura depict the disintegration of the Old South culture. They represent the last of the Southern ladies. Peggy Prenshaw describes the women in Williams’ plays as “Romantic idealists struggling to maintain their false identity” (Prenshaw, *The Paradoxical Southern World* 26). In the plays of Williams, the South represents a microcosm of patriarchal society. His heroines are victims of a double standard of morality. They are crazy about sexual liberty and take pride in throwing away all the moral scruples to the winds. Women of Williams think less and waste their time and energies in enjoying sexual liberty. Williams was inspired by the ideals of the Southern belle, he gave to his women special traits such as

elegance, grace and refined beauty. They are highly imaginative and passionate and crazy about love and sex. No wonder, Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* yearns for the grace and elegance of the Old South. She is always haunted by the old glamour and elegance. Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* lost everything, her job and reputation because of her sexual drives. She starts her new journey and reaches New Orleans as an outsider. Her sister lives here leading a happy domestic life. The presence of Blanche is a threat to Stanley Kowalski who represents class realism. Blanche lives in a different world; she is highly imaginative and dreamy and looks out of setting and place. She holds typical traditional Southern romantic ideals antithetical to the new world of American society. Alma Winemiller's mythical dreams and illusions come in conflict with the real world of John Buchanan. This conflict results into her separation and mental disturbance.

The dramatic strength of Tennessee Williams lies in his experimentation with symbolism. In all his plays, Williams has used symbols and images as tools to articulate the psychic pressures of his women characters. His work is suffused with symbolism. Williams reiterated in his interviews that he relied on metaphorical ways of expression and that symbols are the natural speech of drama. Williams is of the view that art is made out of symbols like the human body is made out of vital tissue. The staging of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944 in Chicago was a great success. Tennessee Williams won fame, fortune and critical respect because of the layers of symbolism in the plot of the drama. The very title of the play is symbolical suggesting the fragile nature of the protagonist. Williams introduces simple language and packed his scenes with layers of symbols. He used the themes of drug addiction, depression, alienation, repressed sexual drives of women and soon became a popular

name in each American family. He himself had used drugs and spent time in St. Louis hospital for the treatment of depression. His personal experiences became a material for the creation of themes and characters. He simply used the myth of the old South to bring originality in his plots, characterization and dialogues.

The vogue of psychoanalysis has transformed the tenor of Western drama in general and contemporary American drama in particular. According to Sigmund Freud, human impulses and cultural values are always at loggerheads. Neurosis is the restlessness that an individual experiences on account of the frustration he faces in society. Freud argued that neurosis is the price an individual pays for the advantages he gains for the growth of civilization. As this neurosis develops, he loses his contact with reality and is driven to seek “substitute satisfaction” (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 36). According to Carl Jung, neurosis is essentially a matter of schism between an individual’s conscious and unconscious desires – “a dissociation of personality due to the existence of complexes” (Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 188). For Alfred Adler, the basis for the neurotic conflict is social set up, while Freud sees in a neurotic very little of social inclination. Adler considered him as one with irresponsible cravings. He is bent on establishing his supremacy in society-an anxiety that springs from a sense of inferiority. John Gassner called Tennessee “the dramatist of frustration” (Gassner, *Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration* 1). It is an admitted fact that all of Tennessee’s heroines suffer from the corrosion of self. Interestingly they withdraw into their own fantasies and seek artificial ecstasy in illusions to conceal their guilt. Crushed under the heavy burden of metaphysical guilt, they suffer total deflation of self and experience anxiety, depression and despair. Non-Freudians like Erich Fromm and

Karen Horney have emphasized “anxiety”, “adult experience” and cultural influence on the individual” as the dominant factors of neurosis. The neurotic person either withdraws into “phantasy life” or “seeks mechanism of escape” like sado-masochism, destructiveness and conformity. R.D. Laing prefers to call it schizoid personality and according to him, the term schizoid refers to an individual who is a split personality. Laing observes that there is disruption in human relations leading to the “deflation of self” (Laing, *The Divided Self* 8). All the psychiatrists observe that neurosis is a sickness in a personality; it seriously debilitates one’s mind and leads to erosion of one’s personality.

The post World War II American plays are full of anguish, frustration and defeat. Tennessee Williams and Albee feel cut off from the old securities as they no longer visualize a harmonious social relationship in a society. Sex, violence, perversion, moral and spiritual damnation fascinate O’Neill, Williams and Albee. Their protagonists are seen hitting back with violence at the machine age that stifled their sensibility and robbed off their individuality. The neurotic protagonist of Albee and Williams is dramatized as a lonely individual, craving for love and affection, a prey to the mental and physical diseases. Their male and female protagonists suffer alienation, anxiety, depression and despair. Tennessee Williams presents his woman when she is in the grip of psychic pressure resulting into her depression. She has only two options in her crisis. She can either face the reality or retreat into illusion. Her passionate tendency to cling to neurotic illusions dehumanizes her personality and debilitates her sensibility. Now neurotic perversion must not be confused with passionate frenzy. For example, Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet also are very passionate but their passions inspire them to act and fight till the end of life. On the other hand,

the neurotic protagonists of Tennessee Williams seek sex and dope; they turn into escapists and degenerate into morbidity.

The setting of *The Glass Menagerie* is in St. Louis apartment where Amanda and her daughter, Laura, live. It is a family drama dealing with the struggles of a middle class family. The plot of the drama reveals the themes of isolation and entrapment due to Amanda who is clinging to the past. The mother is always haunted by her Old South memories and her romantic experiences. Her apartment is described as dark and grim suggesting loneliness. Amanda thinks about her childhood home with gentlemen callers. Williams has used the fire-escape as a symbol of escape from the “fires of human desperation” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 233). In the very beginning of the play, Williams describes the symbolical significance of the Wingfield apartment. Bigsby observes that the apartment is metaphorically a trap. Amanda is sick and a victim of frustration; her husband has deserted her. She tries her best to hold her family but her dreams and false illusion clash with the new hopes and aspirations of Laura and Tom. Amanda has never allowed her children to grow independently; she has always imposed her gentility on her children. Laura cannot grow because of the restrictions of her mother. Laura suffers not because of any external agency but because of the false illusions of her mother. Tom revolts against Amanda’s gentility just to escape to the outside world. Laura remains in the trap and suffers and stagnates. In *The Glass Menagerie*, the glass figures are powerful symbols. Tom is a sailor, a lover of new things and an aspirant to explore the outside world. Williams has used the Old South and the romantic ideals of Amanda as tools to depict her disintegrated self and her passion for false illusions and romantic dreams. She is the mother of two children but is still living in her childhood home.

The story begins with Tom who says that the audience will see an unrealistic “memory play”. He introduces himself; he is a struggling poet working in a shoe factory. He talks about his “big dreams for the future” in a simple and poetic prose. He talks about his small family, about his mother Amanda and Laura. His mother is dominating but his sister Laura is extremely introverted. She is lost in her own fancies and lives in her own cocoon. She is a “cripple”; the mother says it is a slight deformity. Amanda is always seen swinging between the past and the present; she fluctuates between reality and the ideal old South. Her world of gentlemen callers symbolizes her illusions and false dreams. Laura is a fragile young girl like her fragile menagerie. Her world is of old phonograph records and she spends most of her time with them. She is cut off from the outside world and there is no growth in her personality. Laura decorates the Christmas Eve and is lost in her own dream world, far removed from reality:

Laura: “It seems to me we lived on top of a hill...The colour of this!”

Tom: [*looking up and smiling*] “All that bright?”

Laura: “Oh, yes. There was so much light and colour everywhere!”

“We lived inside a - soap-bubble! - in the sun” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 173).

The problem with Amanda is that she closes her eyes and lacks the courage to face the reality. Her husband deserted her for her sexual frigidity. She has a son and daughter to support. The economic worries are gripping her but she lives in her own illusions. Amanda uses illusions as escape mechanisms to endure her present position. Amanda’s utter panic and hysteria in the drama depicts her crisis of life. She is terrified by the dark future of her daughter as she observes:

“I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren’t prepared to occupy a position. I’ve seen such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister’s husband or brother’s wife!—stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room—encouraged by one in-law to visit another—little birdlike women without any nest, eating the crust of humility all their life! Is that the future that we’ve mapped out for ourselves?” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 245).

As a narrator, Tom makes gives complete information about all characters, their problems and challenges of life. He has a double role in the drama; he opens the play and ends the play. He is the narrator and the main protagonist of the drama also. He is passing through economic crisis as there is no earning hand in the family. He relies on the old memories; his mother and sister, Laura, live within his memory. In the plot of the drama, all characters are seen obsessed with depression and alienation. Amanda’s psychic pressure is because her husband deserted her and the family was trapped in the bog of poverty. Amanda’s response to life generates destructive consequences for the children. She is found lost in her own dreams and delusions of her girlhood romantic adventures. She is ignoring the realities of life. As she brags to Tom and Laura:

“One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain-your mother received-seventeen gentlemen callers! Why? Sometimes there weren’t chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house” (8).

Amanda is a neurotic protagonist of Tennessee Williams who lives in a world of false delusions; she suffers from a sense of nostalgia for the past that is dead; her longing for an age of chivalry and elegance lands her into troubles. Her admission that she wasn't prepared for what the future had in store for her is a clue to her false delusions. She believes that she belongs to the early age of aristocratic life, not to the routine of her St. Louis Tenement. In the words of Signi Falk:

In her pathetic refusal to be realistic, she clings to such delusions as a certainty that she could have married any of her now wealthy gentlemen callers if she had not fallen in love with the man in the soldier suit or her conviction that her children are exceptional (Signi Falk, *The Profitable World of Tennessee Williams* 177).

Amanda has her own obsolete vision of life. Her passivity in coping with the miseries of life brings disaster in her family. Amanda is a Southern Belle with her big dreams and romantic expectations. She weaves a web of false illusions for herself and for her children. She thinks she is always right and she decides everything for her children. Cate and Presley have investigated her character and found her a biased mother.

Amanda is a silly spinster; self-centred who is worried about her own loss of beauty and age. She is dominating and wants to rule her children inflicting her values on them (Presley, *The Search for God* 93).

In the American society the mothers were always obsessed with the thought of marrying their daughters. Amanda is also worried about the marriage of Laura.

She is anxious to find a suitable and ideal match for Laura. She wants to secure a match for the happy life of her daughter. She lacks the moral courage to confront reality in admitting that Laura is crippled. Amanda knows that Laura is shy and introvert but she doesn't admit the reality. She urges Tom to bring a young man home from his work place for Laura. She wants to revive her old romantic adventures. She wants to re-enact the scene of her gentleman callers. She puts her own dreams upon Laura who is a shy girl. The problem with Amanda is that she is still living in the Old South and inflicts her dreams and illusions upon Laura.

Laura is physically handicapped and this weakness is a big hurdle in her marriage. She is the victim of psychic tensions and doesn't dare to meet a gentleman caller. Her psychological withdrawal is resulting into agoraphobia. Amanda thinks and decides everything in her own typical way. She acts as a Southern belle and she gives the same therapy to Laura who is unable to grasp her romantic ideology. No wonder when Laura confronts the young man, she is broken into pieces. She is too fragile to face a situation; she looks unattractive and is frightened by the presence of a stranger. Tom brings Jim O'Connor for the marriage of Laura. Laura is terribly frightened because she suffers from inferiority complex. However, Jim's presence and support relaxes her. Laura feels comfortable and Jim feels Laura has started liking him. But soon the shell is broken. Jim tells her that he is already engaged. Laura is shocked and she is hurt. She goes back to her fragile world. The whole situation is painful to Laura. For Laura, the experience is really tormenting but to Amanda, the situation is a source of romantic thrill. Amanda is excited when she comes to know that a suitor is coming for Laura. She recollects her own past and cries thus: "Preparations! Why didn't you phone me at once?" (Williams, *The Glass*

Menagerie 267). Amanda is a selfish mother; she tells lies about Laura. She boasts before the young Jim and talks about her management of the household like an ideal housewife. Amanda uses all false means to entrap Jim. Laura calls the fake means “a little trap” and is not happy about the scheming efforts of her mother. She uses false devices to enhance Laura’s appearance to entrap Jim. Laura is the product of the modern brave American society as she hates whitewashing and the artificial methods of her mother. Amanda lives in the illusion that all pretty girls are a trap; beauty and elegance are weapons to conquer men (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 275). Tom tries to calm her down but she bursts out:

“You just don’t know. We can’t have a gentleman caller in a pigsty! All my wedding silver has to be polished; the monogrammed table linen ought to be laundered! The windows have to be washed and fresh curtains put up. And how about clothes? We have to *wear* something, don’t we?” (267).

Laura doesn’t want to open the door; she is terrified by the appearance of the gentleman caller. She protests thus: “Oh, Mother, please answer the door, don’t make me do it! ...I’m *sick!*” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 278). She becomes sick as she is too fragile to confront the reality. Amanda is really worried about the future of her daughter. She doesn’t want her to lead a lonely life like her. She tries every possible method to win her a match. Her hunt for the perfect gentleman caller fails. She feels disturbed to think that Laura dropped out of school:

“So what are *we* going to do rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie,

darling? Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him? We don't have a business career—we've given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion! What is there left but dependency all our lives?" (245).

Amanda feels guilt-ridden since she is a failure as a housewife and as a mother of two children. Ironically she is still worried about her lost youth and beauty that has withered out. She inflicts her own needs onto Laura and tries to use Laura for her own romantic glamour. She struggles to escape from the dark alley apartment but Laura blocks her way. She suffers from neurotic tensions but she gets a release from them recollecting the Old South. She has grown selfish and self-centred. Mathur notes: "Amanda is far away from the world of reality" (Mathur, *Women in the Plays* 80). All her actions are centred on others. Amanda has a hard time and she is seriously concerned about her present loss of elegance and gentility. In the sixth scene of the play she once again is lost into the past when a gentleman caller comes to visit Laura:

"Now look at your mother! This is the dress in which I led the cotillion, won the cakewalk twice at Sunset Hill, wore one spring to the Governor's ball in Jackson! See how I sashayed around the ballroom, Laura? I wore it on Sundays for my gentlemen callers! I had it on the day I met your father" (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 276).

Amanda is aged now, she has two grown up children but she still clings to her old past and recalls her past romantic glories. She recollects her seventeen

suitors to break the monotony and alienation of her life. She desperately tries to bring order in the family: "...Tom – Tom - Life's not easy. It calls for Spartan endurance: there's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you: I have never told you but I – loved your father..." (38).

Amanda is a snob; her elegance and beauty have faded out but she uses the worn out memories as her point of reference for everything connected with goodness, truth and reality. She tries to hold two worlds together in vain. She realizes that her old world is crumbling beneath her feet. Her sexual repression and nostalgic sensibility leads to a neurotic instability which blurs her value judgement. A clash between the adult Tom and his sexually repressed mother is inevitable. David Sievers has observed thus:

Williams uses the Freudian language to dramatize the corrosion of self of his heroines. All his women are victims of false illusions and delusions struggling to cling to their lost past in a neurotic manner. Williams uses psychological images to depict their traumatic sufferings; their lust for life, love and sex (Sievers, *A History of Psychoanalysis and the American Drama* 377).

Amanda's sexual repression, nostalgic sensibility and feelings of alienation lead to a neurotic instability which deflates her. Sexual anxiety is an irrevocable force which disintegrates the personality of Williams' women. It is sexual morbidity and repression that lead them to frustration and despair and become the cause of the corrosion of self. Amanda had married a telephone man who deserted her after siring two children, Tom and Laura. She led a lonely life without her husband. It was a big

blow to her ego. The sixteen years of loneliness have clearly affected her life. Amanda was a beautiful woman; her seventeen suitors justify her claim that she was the most sought after. Now she has become a broken one. She could never forget the loss of her gentility. She is confused, pathetic and even stupid and fails as a mother and as a wife. The entire play is directed towards depicting the poetry of frustration- a translucent world peopled by neurotic and shadowy figures, the protagonists who suffer corrosion of self. Each lives in his or her own world - Amanda longs for the past, Laura is imprisoned in the prison of the present and Tom expresses his longing for the future which is uncertain. All of them are sick neurotics totally unfit to cope with life. Their struggle is always a continuous retreat- "among pathetic, melodramatic or boisterous, but it is always a withdrawal" (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 110).

Laura is both a fragile and truncated woman of Tennessee Williams. She is the main protagonist of the play. She remains on the stage from the beginning to the last scene. Laura is portrayed through the symbol of her glass menagerie. The title of the play is associated with her: "If You Breathe, It Breaks", this refers to her menagerie and "*Portrait of a Girl in Glass.*" Williams gives us the relationship between reality and imagination through Laura. Laura symbolizes the static life, her inertia forms the main trait of her personality. She has no identity, no status, no personal ambition. Her mother, Amanda, rules and governs her life. Laura is a dumb wooden statue, a crippled girl, a drop-out from school. Her mother acts as a remote control for her since most of the time she is lost in her old records gifted by her father. Laura also suffers the corrosion of self as she is cut off from the world of reality and thus is a lonely, disintegrated self. Her corrosion of self begins with the

arrival of the gentleman caller for whom she is not prepared. Williams depicts the world of false illusions of Laura who is far away from reality. Laura is painted as a lovely statue; a fragile woman like her “breakable glass collection” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 129). In the Third Scene, Tom revolts against the stifling environment of the apartment. He waves his overcoat across the room in frustration. In the climax of the drama, Laura’s glass collection breaks and there is a tinkle of shattering glass. Laura is “wounded in body and in spirit” (164). Williams depicts her neurotic dual personality. She is both a character and a symbol. Laura represents all that is “tender and breakable.” The tragic story of Laura evokes the feelings of pity. She becomes a victim of her selfish and stupid mother. Tom breaks all the chains of his mother and leaves the apartment to explore the outer world.

Tom suffers the corrosion of self and in desperation; he leaves his mother at the end of the drama. He “smashes his glass on the floor” and then “plunges out on the fire escape, slamming the door. Laura screams in fright” (236). Williams uses the imagery of cracked marble to depict the truncated self of Laura. Tom gives the message to the Americans that you have to break the shell to know the world. Dreams and illusions cannot make a man happy. Williams has used Laura as a painted statue. The playwright has used several psychological images to depict Laura’s fragility. Laura is lost in the world of music because it provides her a safety valve to get release from the tensions and worries of life. She is a neurotic character, fragile and misfit. She boasts before Jim about her musical records thus:

“I’ve hundreds of pieces of delicate things made of glass. These are only a few that we put on display in the parlor. The windows and shelves of my bedroom are covered with glass! On sunny days I live inside rainbow! A rainbow” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 123).

Amanda and Tom live in different worlds. Amanda dreams of her gentlemen callers when she was a young and beautiful blonde. Tom too has created a temporal otherworld as he struggles to escape from the world of illusions and the sordidness of his life. He is a lost young man, a victim of recession of post World War II. Williams has created him as a representative of the lost generation of America. Tom tells Amanda that Laura lives “in a world of her own—a world of little glass ornaments, Mother. She plays old phonograph records and—that’s about all-” (188). Both Laura and Tom are lost in the world of fantasy of films. In Scene II, Laura confesses to watching them (155). Tom is passionate to see movies and ignores all the warnings of his mother. In the Sixth Scene of the drama, Tom expresses his frustration and boredom regarding his experience about the movies to Jim:

“You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! [. . .] I am tired of the *movies* and I am *about to move!*” (201).

Tom and Laura are tragic protagonists who are misfit in the contemporary American culture. Tom envisions a paradisiacal otherworld that proves to be illusory. In the Third Scene of the drama, Amanda punctures the morality of Tom when she confiscates his books:

“Look! I’d rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains—than go back mornings! I go! Every time you come in yelling that God damn, ‘*Rise and Shine!*’ I say to myself, ‘How lucky dead

people are!’ But I get up. I go! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being *ever!*” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 251-252).

The climax of the situation comes when Tom makes a historical decision to leave everyone to start his own independent life. He decides to leave his job to start a new digging, breaking all the shells of his mother. This threatens Amanda who expresses her reaction in a fit of paranoia: “What right have you got to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all? How do you think we’d manage if you were ” (251). Tom realizes for the first time that all the sufferings of the Wingfields are due to the false ideals of Amanda. She emerges as a driving relentless force in the drama wrecking the lives of everyone. Amanda is constantly haunted by her old past and she inflicts her own ideology on her children. Amanda tells Tom: “You are the only young man that I know of who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don’t plan for it” (269).

Williams depicts the theme of sexual repression and its impact on the psyche of Amanda and Laura. Promiscuity and sexuality are same for Amanda. She dreams of her gentlemen callers again and again in a fit of sexual repression. Freud observes that sexual repression is a psychological ailment in an individual. Amanda is horrified to find the books of D.H Lawrence. In desperation she confiscates Tom’s books by D.H Lawrence. Her action symbolizes her sexual repression. Amanda shouts: “I won’t allow such filth brought into my house!” (Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* 250). She doesn’t allow Tom to read books with a sexual content. She

reprimands Tom when he says that “man is by instinct a lover, a hunter and a fighter” (260). Amanda expresses an explosive reaction:

“Man is by instinct! Don’t quote instinct to me. Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don’t want it! ... [They want] superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys and pigs” (260).

Amanda’s sexual remark that “instinct is something that people have got away from” (260) suggests that she is desperate to control emotions and passions of everyone in the house. Amanda thus holds the power to define gender and sexuality in the play. She dominates her children and implements her past ideas of conventional social behaviour. Her Southern belle past haunts her children as much as it haunts her.

The appearance of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947 made Tennessee Williams an international celebrity, the performance of Jessica Tandy and Marlon Brando made the play a big hit on the Broadway. The play is the somber tragedy of a woman who is blind to the reality of life and lives in her illusions. The heroine of the drama is Blanche DuBois. In French language, DuBois means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods. Blanche boasts that her family is “French by extraction” (Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* 99). Blanche is proud of her old traditions and glamour of her family background. She is proud of her property and nobility of her family. Blanche begins her journey with “the loss of her Belle Reve plantation, the DuBois family home” (211). Blanche lies to the other characters to create her ideal past, in her own words, she tells what

“ought to be the truth” (204). *A Streetcar Named Desire* portrays the life of a woman who has strange behaviour. She often takes shower and bath in hot tub when the temperature is high; she feels scared to stand up in the bright light; she always lies and always wants to be seen perfect in front of men. She cannot accept the reality that happened in her life that made her behaviour strange. She takes pride in often telling lies and in her fake and artificial attitude.

If Allan is the symbol of an ideal past then Shep Huntleigh is most definitely the symbol of her ideal future, a future of the beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit. Blanche married Allan at the age of sixteen who committed suicide in desperation being homosexual. Blanche finds out the shocking truth about Allan, quarrels with Allan, exposes him and heaps indignities on him. She condemns him and he commits suicide. Blanche is sexual, promiscuous and crazy. She traps men for her sexual pleasures. Her experience with men has transformed her into a town whore. She has taken many lovers and eventually becomes a prostitute. The turning point comes in her life when she seduced a young school boy and was dismissed from the school by the Management in Laurel. This struggle between the old and the new is echoed throughout the two plays. *Streetcar* is a constant struggle between Blanche’s old fashioned views and Stanley’s new philosophy until the end when the new triumphs over the old:

Stanley represents the future: progress through hard work and single minded ambition. The Dubois way of life, the old southern aristocracy has ended. Stanley is allegorical of the ‘American Dream’ at a workingman’s level with his realist, hardworking persona and his new motto, “Every man is a king” (Williams, *A Streetcar* 195).

Blanche loses her job and reputation but she continues to be elegant, romantic and idealistic about love and sex. The loss of their family home, Belle Reve, shatters her dreams of a settled life. She is forced to leave Laurel and goes to New Orleans to take shelter there; a place where her sister and brother-in-law live. Stanley is leading a settled life with his wife but Blanche enters into his world as an outsider. Blanche is carrying the burden of illicit sexual deeds and she is condemned by her immoral behaviour. Boxill observes that Blanche is on her last legs; she a widow without any security of life; she is lonely and without a job and a refugee from the “collapsed ruling class of the old agrarian South” (Boxill, *Tennessee Williams* 80). Blanche has lost everything but she still maintains her identity as a Southern belle. Williams presents her as a moth-like with “delicate beauty that must avoid a strong light” (117). As Elia Kazan points out in his *Notebook on A Streetcar Named Desire* that Blanche cannot face reality, so she has to create her own ideology about truth. Blanche “cannot live; in fact her whole life has been for nothing” (Kazan 22). Blanche’s hysterical nature rattles and confuses everybody as she is an expert in changing the subject to her advantage. In *Scene One*, Blanche lies about her financial circumstances. She uses her tactics to win sympathy.

Blanche successfully hides the fact that she was dismissed from her job because of her sexual relationship with a seventeen year old High School student. She feels that she “took the blows” in her face. Blanche is a fading beauty as she continues pretending that she is a chaste woman. Belle Reve’s white columns are symbolic of Blanche’s ‘pure dream’; the irony lies in the fact that it was gradually lost through the desire of her family’s “epic fornications” (Williams, *A Streetcar* 140). Ironically her dresses and cheap ornaments symbolize her horrible past. She is

carrying junk and trash as she is a victim of corrosion of self. Blanche is the owner of this cheap and artificial property struggling to find a space for her. She has lost all roots but even then she is clinging to her lost past. Blanche is an aging Southern belle. She knows that she has lost her old glamour but she creates an illusion of her gorgeous appearance. Blanche uses all fair and foul means to secure a place in the world of Stella and Stanley. She struggles to calm her nervousness down but she is always worried about her fading beauty. Blanche always desires to look sexually attractive to new male admirers.

Blanche is a wonderful character created by Williams who lives in her own false illusion and dreams. Blanche is superb in acting and she pretends she has never known debauchery. Stanley digs her past and it's he who found her "documents": "These are love letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy" (489). Blanche is a country whore; she developed illicit relations with many men. It is interesting that Blanche never admits that she has been promiscuous and continues to tell everyone that she is chaste. In the very first scene of the play, she is on the verge of disintegration; she lost the family plantation and her youth. Her crisis begins when she comes to know that her husband Allan was a homosexual. The memory of this guilt recurs and this is why she wants to avoid the "blinking light" of naked bulbs. Blanche does not want to face her rejection of her husband and the part she played in his suicide. Turning to sex as an escape from the nightmarish reality, Blanche becomes an English teacher with rather unusual extra-curricular activities.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche is allegorical of illusion whereas Stanley is allegorical of reality. "Stanley's animalistic and realistic approach to life contrasts with Blanche's genteel and illusionary way of life. Blanche's illusion is

obvious in her song” (Williams, *A Streetcar* 186). Ultimately Blanche’s illusions of the past, present and future are shattered by Stanley’s harsh reality. New Orleans of Stanley is brutish; the environment is dominated by gambling, bowling, sex and drinking. Blanche is horrified by its lack of ideals that are the most important to her. In Scene One Stella warns Blanche about the company she is about to enter: “I’m afraid you won’t think they are lovely ... They’re Stanley’s friends. They’re a mixed lot, Blanche” (124). Blanche is confronted with a brutal and animalistic primitive world represented by Stanley. Williams dramatizes a conflict between the false ideals of Blanche with the primitive and crude culture of Stanley. Blanche is unmasked and exposed by Stanley as illusions are destructive in nature. The problem with Blanche is her false morality and virginity. She thinks that she is a paragon of beauty ignoring the reality of her fading glamour. She fails to adjust in the savage community of people represented by Stanley. The Poker night brings the curtain down for her as Stanley exposes her. The poker night brings the doom for Blanche as she loses everything. Stanley’s brutish behaviour breaks all illusions of Blanche; he digs her past and saves the life of innocent Mitch who is likely to be the prey of Blanche. The tragic fall of Blanche is imminent as she fails to conform to her current surroundings and situation.

One of our first images of Stella is of her with something spilt on her white lace collar (122). This may be symbolic of Stella’s sexual maturity or perhaps her sexual dependence on Stanley. When Blanche stains her white skirt, she gives “a piercing cry” (170). This is symbolic of Blanche’s own tainted purity. Later on Blanche dreams of a pure death, buried in a “clean white sack” (220). Stanley is described in animal terms throughout the play. He is reminiscent of an animal

bearing food after a kill in the jungle. We get a description of his animal sexuality in Scene One:

Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens ... his emblem of the gaudy seed bearer (128).

Blanche tries to tame the male beast by taking his masculine air away: “She sprays herself with the atomizer; then playfully sprays him with it. He seizes the atomizer and slams it down on the dresser...” (123). Her attempt to take Stanley’s masculinity away by spraying him with women’s perfume and by trying to weaken him with her flirting fails since he is not interested in her illusion. Williams uses the same kind of symbols, imagery and allegorical figures to depict the stages of disintegration of Blanche. Blanche’s confrontation with Stanley is ambivalent. In the very first scene. Blanche regards Stanley’s half-naked torso with horror as her false morality is threatened by the primitive Stanley. After Scene IV, Blanche violently criticizes him as ‘primitive’, ‘subhuman’, ‘apelike’, ‘madman’ and ‘brute’. The second stage of her corrosion of self begins when she enters the world of her sister’s world. In New Orleans she meets Mitch and plans to seduce him. She thinks he can give him love and security of life. Mitch is a good hunt for Blanche because she can escape poverty by marrying him. Blanche dreams of getting a new life and will get a new image in the society. All her old deeds will be forgotten. Blanche has no money, no home and no job; she sees the marriage to Mitch as her last chance. Blanche tries to conceal her age, lies about taking liquor, although she has emptied

Stanley's bottle. She pretends to be pure and chaste like Diana. Blanche turns sexy and exhibitionist before Stanley's poker playing friends. She sings erotic songs to hook Mitch. She conceals her wrinkles by shading the naked bulbs with paper lanterns, her drinking by insisting that she rarely touches it; and her isolation by recalling some millionaire, Shep Huntleigh, to whom she can appeal whenever disaster brushes too close. Blanche admits her alienation and the vital need for a man when Stella asks her if she wanted Mitch: "I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes! – I want Mitch... very badly! Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem..." (Williams, *A Streetcar* 171). Fighting a lost battle, she makes a desperate effort but gets caught in her own net. As she has lied too much to conceal her past, Stanley exposes her and digs her past. Mitch is not able to withstand the truth. That Blanche is a schizoid personality is implicit in Benjamin Nelson's famous observation: "It is obvious that she is un-well: she is hypersensitive, giggling too much and talking too much" (Nelson, *Tennessee Williams: The Man and His Work* 131). R.D. Laing observes that "in the schizophrenic state, the world is in ruins, and the self is corroded or dead. Blanche is also in her state of disorientation and nothing can restore her" (Laing, *The Divided Self* 156). Blanche too struggles in vain, for her pack of lies, her over-refined manners, speech, and physical appearance lead her nowhere. Stanley tells everything about her to Mitch. Mitch rejects Blanche and this fact only supports Blanche's crumbling self-image and sanity. Mitch is also worried about his alienation. He has also experienced a "pretty sad romance with a dying girl" (Williams, *A Streetcar* 53). Blanche entraps Mitch evoking pity in him: "You need somebody. And I need somebody too. Could it be-you and me, Mitch?" (184). In sexual passion she falls into his arms. Blanche comes under the false illusion that Mitch fits into her world

as he can give her the much needed protection. Mitch is tender and easy going and he will surely take care of her. Blanche genuinely thanks God for Mitch who seems to her as “the poor man’s paradise” where she can have her “peace” (205) from the cruel world.

Stella and Stanley are leading a happy life but Blanche disturbs their peaceful existence. That is what makes *Streetcar*, in the words of W.Gibbs, “a brilliant implacable play about the disintegration of a woman, or if you like, of a society” (Gibbs, *The Character of Blanche Dubois* 54). Blanche is terribly frightened. Her flight from the horrid nightmare of her existence is her compulsion. She enters the world of Stanley to seek peace and rest and to find a safe haven. Her tragic flaw is that she cannot abandon the role of a gracious, refined lady of the Old South. The glamorized neurotic behaves like an injured “grand duchess”. Stella has adjusted with Stanley; she has made a radical compromise with life (150). The climax of her rejection of the past and acceptance of the new comes when she has to choose between Stanley, the rapist, and Blanche. She chooses Stanley and lets Blanche slip away into insanity. In this process she, as Bigsby says:

Blanche opts for the future over the past, for potency over sterility. And if that also means accepting a world bereft of protective myth and cultural adornments, this is a compromise which she has the strength to make. Blanche cannot and is broken (Bigsby, *Confrontation and Commitment* 66).

Blanche’s passionate indictment of Stanley brings her downfall. She condemns Stanley in the most disgraceful words, calls him a primitive savage thus:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! ...Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by and there he is! ...Stanley Kowalski- survivor of the Stone Age!... May be we were a long way from being made in God's image...there has been some progress since then! (Williams, *A Streetcar* 175).

Blanche's inner self is dead when she descends into the world of Stella; her confrontation with Stanley reveals the dialectic of her frantic activity which results in her total corrosion of self and collapse. In a 1975 interview with the *New York Times*, Tennessee Williams tells that he created Blanche seeking inspiration from his father's sister who was the prototype of Blanche. She talked like Blanche—hysterically and with great eloquence. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the fall of Blanche is a parable of the loss of the American Dream. Her story is the story of a neurotic who clings to the old gentility and lives in her false illusions and delusions ignoring the reality of human existence. She emerges as an allegory of a defeated woman who becomes a victim of the sexual drives in her quest for material advancement. The life history dramatized in *A Streetcar* is the story of Blanche's downfall; she goes downward and downward as the plot progresses. She becomes promiscuous, a town whore, loses her husband and her sexual drives land her into troubles. Blanche falls into nymphomania, phantasmagoric hopes and her life becomes hellish. Williams is famous for excavating the inner world of his trapped and fragile women. *The Glass Menagerie* introduced Amanda Wingfield who is a silly, garrulous, spinsterish widow. In *A Streetcar*, Tennessee Williams makes an experiment with the dramatic technique. There are seven Scenes, the dramatist experiments with light, music using words and images to depict the traumatic experiences of women. All these devices are very effective in dramatizing the fall

and downward journey of Blanche. Williams' use of memory, dream and desire is very significant in the drama. The playwright wants the audience to witness a conflict between spirit and flesh. He uses the imagery of stasis as his primary symbol for spirituality and innocence. As Dr. Horney observes: "Sexual activities may serve as the safety-valve through which anxiety can be released" (Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts* 52). Blanche's anxiety rises when she observes her sister, Stella, leading an adjustable life with her husband, Stanley, but there being no outlet, her sexual anxiety becomes an obsession. No wonder, she takes resort to hot baths and shots of whisky. Joseph M. Riddel observes that "her obsessive bathing is a normal gesture of guilt and her neurotic quest for redemption" (Riddel, *A Streetcar Named Desire* 426). Tennessee Williams has used "bath" as a functional symbol depicting Blanche's world of neurotic illusions and fantasies.

Elia Kazan who directed the play for the first time observed that the baths, music and Jazz catch the soul of Blanche. Her innocence is lost because of her sexual drives. Blanche constantly lives in her illusions and believes that she is pure and chaste. Williams has exposed her "duplicity, her treachery, and her lies" (Williams, *A Streetcar* 171). The bath syndrome exposes Blanche as a sexual adventurer playing her sex games with Stanley and Mitch who is his poker friend.

Blanche: "How do I look?"

Stanley: "You look all right!"

Blanche: "Many thanks! Now the buttons!"

Stanley: "I can't do anything with them!"

Blanche: "You men with big clumsy fingers. May I have a drag on your cig?" (Williams, *A Streetcar* 136).

Following is the Graph of the development of neurosis of Blanche:



Stanley reveals the barrage of facts of Blanche's dirty past and wrecks all her hopes of marrying Mitch. Blanche is trapped in a terrifying contradiction. Betrayed by her own illusions, she is an easy victim for Stanley who rapes her at the end of the drama to punish her:

“I’ve been on to you from the start! Not once did you pull any wool over this boy’s eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and cover the light bulb with a paper lantern, and lo and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say-Ha-Ha-...” (Williams, *A Streetcar* 213).

When Blanche tries to threaten Stanley with a broken bottle, he calls her: “Tiger! Drop the bottle! Drop! Drop it! We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning!” (215). Her rape visualizes the triumph of reality over illusions and the ultimate corrosion of self of Blanche who is removed to an asylum at the end.

To conclude, Tennessee Williams is a playwright of the broken and depressed people; he has conceived heroines who are shattered as they are too vulnerable to confront the reality of life. Most of them like Amanda and Blanche live in the world of false illusions and fantasies. They resort to sexual activities as sex and dope act as a safety valve to release their neurotic passions. They live in a fake, unreal world detached from mundane realities. As a consequence, they suffer the inexplicable agony of the loss of self.

Chapter 5

Albee and the Theatre of Loss: Suicide as a Tool for Survival of the Protagonists of Edward Albee and Beckett

Edward Albee appeared in the American Theatre in 1959 and depicted the theme of loss and human depression. He used suicide as a tool to dramatize the metaphysical theme of human despair. Albee appeared at a time when both Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller had already passed their zenith. He published his first play *The Zoo Story* in 1958 and since then he dazzled the audience winning his third Pulitzer Prize in 1991 for *Three Tall Women*. In 2000 he won the Tony Award for his play *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* in 2000. Albee's career has spanned almost half a century and it has seen many ups and downs in terms of quality. Albee's appearance proved very lucky for the American theatre since he appeared at a time when America was desperately looking for a new playwright. As C.W.E Bigsby observes, "If Edward Albee had not existed he would most certainly have been invented" (Bigsby, *Edward Albee and the Great God Reality* 249). When he emerged in 1959, the theatre was in its usual state of crisis but it was a crisis which seemed more serious and more irremediable than usual. There was a crisis which went much deeper than the apparent decline or actual disappearance of the major dramatists of the previous period. Albee seized the occasion and became the American playwright of the 1960s. Albee successfully blended the realistic with the surreal. Albee's *The Zoo Story* appeared in New York, on January 14, 1960. Albee reacted against the plays and the conventions of O'Neill and Arthur Miller. Albee's *The Zoo Story* depicted the agonies and disillusionment of that decade with intensity

and frankness. The performance of the play surprised the drama critics of America as Albee depicted unconventional themes of alienation and anxiety of people. The mood of the youth was of frustration and despair since they found the illusion of progress and good life false and misleading. The young generation lashed at the very foundations of the American Dream. The early fifties was the period of the cold war, McCarthyism and the new war conflict with Korea, the consequences of which brought alienation and broken communications as is evident in the *The Zoo Story* of Edward Albee. The feeling of deep disillusionment, the growing sense of nihilism characteristic of World War II, found its place in the American drama. Albee was inspired by the Theatre of the Absurd as he borrowed heavily from the French dramatists-Ionesco, Genet and Beckett. The new themes and challenges of the American Society were depicted in *The Zoo Story* with new methods and techniques. Albee realized that the situation after World War II was very grim. He could not express the poignant alienation of the contemporary youth with the techniques of Miller and the realist drama. He needed new modes of expression, new settings, new plot structures and new imagery to depict the struggles of the individuals who long for death to escape from the harsh realities of life. He was considered as a pioneer of the American version of the contemporary Theatre of the Absurd which had dominated the European scene for some time.

Following Ionesco, Beckett and Genet, Albee highlights the absurdity of human existence, despair involved in the process of living and the constant threat to the failure of humanness in man by the failure of sex, love and communication. For Albee, however, these are not the attendant problems of a metaphysical or religious world as they are to Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco, but the result of a sick culture. Martin Esslin called The Theatre of the Absurd as a literature of “verbal nonsense”.

The plays of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Albee have no story or plot and are peopled with almost mechanical puppets. They have neither a beginning nor an end but often seem to be reflections of dreams and nightmares consisting of incoherent babblings, or witty repartees and pointed dialogues. Albee combines laughter with dark humour. Nicoll sums up the essence of Absurd drama thus:

Here is the dramatic mirror which shows us the basic Absurdities of present day men, able to achieve undreamt of wonders by the application of their scientific imagination and yet the constant prey of devouring thoughts and passions: here are the human beings so proud of their ability to communicate with each other, delineated in such a manner as to demonstrate the meaninglessness of their common talk; here are men and women outwardly logical and sensible, who are victims of psychological and social irrationalities; here, in fact, is a vision of man and his universe which may seem entirely new and fresh (Nicoll, *English Drama* 5).

John Gassner explored all the elements of the Absurd Theatre that influenced Edward Albee when he wrote *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* It was Albert Camus who is considered an authority on the Absurd Art, he explicates the absurd situation in the following words:

The absurd describes a universe divested of illusions and lights. In this universe man is cut off from all his roots, he is alien to his religion and metaphysics. Myths and old stories don't sustain him. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of the lost home or the hope of a promised land (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* xii).

Albee dealt with the theme of absurdity of the human situation in all his plays. He ridiculed the success myth, the image of American manhood and the institution of marriage. Albee's *The Zoo Story* brought him world-wide recognition since he borrowed heavily from the Theatre of the Absurd. It is a drama of language. It is quite interesting that Albee uses the tools of suicide in the plot structure of the drama. Jean Gould aptly comments:

He had spoken out at last, telling the truth in sweeping indictment of the world as he had found it—a world that made conformity a virtue and nonconformity a vice, a disease (Gould, *Modern American Playwrights* 277).

Albee soon realized that human life after War II had been threatened by many socio-political factors. With the loss of self in the contemporary literature, the protagonist is a schizoid personality. No wonder in the existentialist works of Strindberg, Pirandello, Dostoevsky, Proust, Joyce, Beckett and Ionesco, the traditional concept of character is totally lost. Since the traditional Greek heroes were committed to a noble cause, their quest for identity led them to explore the meaning of salvation and redemption. On the contrary, Albee's Jerry and George become schizoid and think of committing suicide to escape from the harsh realities of life. An Albee protagonist is predominantly a sick neurotic self that seems to have lost its reality. Dwelling in a universe that seems to him alien and hostile, the neurotic protagonist retreats within only to discover that he does not know himself; but the curse is that he must at all costs strive to know. Being abnormal creatures, Albee's protagonists are lost fragmented souls, victims of instincts and therefore too weak to endure existence.

Albee dramatizes a frustrating parody of human contact; he deals with the themes of hatred, humour, anger and nausea. Albee's *The Zoo Story* is a long one-act play in which "nothing happens". Peter and Jerry are involved in nonsensical exchange of dialogues until the violent ending. Man suffered alienation and displacement, moral degradation and corrosion of self. David Riesman wrote his famous book *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and discussed the psychological predicament of modern man who was afflicted with the cancer of alienation. Albee depicts the haunting loneliness and the human despair to establish a 'connect' with others. Albee gave a new voice to American drama projecting Jerry as a victim of the sick mercantile American culture, as observed by Stephen Bottoms "Albee empowered the disempowered. Jerry is the anti-establishment, counterculture hero" (Bottoms, *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee* 19).

Albee's protagonists are indeed nude-stripped semblances of what is called "character". They suffer corrosion of self in gradual stages, their integrated self collapses in slow stages through an oscillation between what is and what appears to be, between reality and illusion. Their actions are meaningless, their struggle is futile and communication lost. Albee traces the history of the dissolution of Jerry and George. The protagonists of Albee are bound to the wheel of time and headed for the destiny of death. Jerry, George and Martha, Nick and Honey are characterized by an inner division. Albee's protagonists are fragments of debris, thrown up by "time". They are not men of action like the traditional heroes of Sophocles and Shakespeare but "un-beings" given to meaningless reflection who use suicide as a tool for survival. Albee's neurotic strikes as an absence, a self stripped off ontological truth. Jerry cannot say "I" with any measure of conviction and certainty. The protagonists

of *The Zoo Story* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are such neurotic victims of loneliness, depression, anger, violence, anxiety and other psychic pressures. Dramatizing the "dilemmas of the borderline personality" in the tradition of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet, Jerry is a case of neurosis fit for treatment in a mental hospital. Jane Brody in his article "The Case is Familiar but the Theatre is Absurd" published in *The New York Times* observed thus: "The borderline is a person who has severe difficulties maintaining a stable and gratifying relationship" (Brody 15). Caught in a paradoxical situation, Jerry longs for human contact, seeks it everywhere and then does all he can to ward it off when it comes. Jerry's problems are of a neurotic kind: a victim of internal and external forces, he lives in a void which leads him to death and destruction.

Albee's *The Zoo Story* depicts an acute lack of communication of Peter and Jerry. The protagonists are isolated human beings, lonely and desperate yearning for human contact. Albee's *The Zoo Story*, dramatizes the impotency, sterility, alienation and anxiety of the neurotic protagonists who failed in love and marital relationships. Groping in the abyss of darkness, they are sticking to their neurotic fantasies and illusions which are their only hope to live in the wasteland of contemporary America. Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet also have illusions for which they grapple with the external forces, but theirs are heroic battles. They die for a cause and their illusions lead them to enlightenment and redemption. But the neurotic illusions of these fragmented souls lead them to frustration, defeat, death and despair. Albee's characters are fragile creatures like the broken heroines of Tennessee Williams who create their own worlds of illusion to escape from the hostility of the mercantile selfish society. Martha, Nick and Jerry create a false

illusion to lead a life of life in death. Albee excited the interest of many critics who explored his ambiguity with their wide range of interpretations. As Kolin and Davis point out, “Albee is the most absorbing postwar American dramatist, ranking only second to O’Neill as a subject for critical exegesis” (Davis, *Critical Essays* 2). Rutenberg stressed the social aspect of Albee’s plays describing their sociological relevance. Albee was a serious dramatist who took up the social issues which gripped the psyche of the youth after the War and the great Depression. Stenz focused on the psychology of the characters. Martin Esslin felt a strong urge to determine the degree of absurdism in Albee’s plays. Erick Bentley observed that the theatre is “the externalization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all perverse possibilities of the mind are localized” (Bentley, *In Search of Theatre* 76). Ann Paolucci took great interest in the plays of Edward Albee. Mann called him the “dean of Albee scholars.” C. W. E Bigsby was another dedicated critic of Albee who contributed a lot to Albee’s criticism. Bigsby wrote many books, research articles on American drama in general and on the plays of Albee. Two decades of criticism have proved that *The Zoo Story* is a study in man’s loneliness in general and the modern American man’s struggle for survival. Jerry is the lost animal of the Zoo world, sensitive and belligerent. He is full of hatred, self-pity and self-imposed isolation. C. W. E Bigsby observes thus:

Albee’s thesis is that there is a need to make contact, to emerge from these self-imposed cages of convention and false values so that one individual consciousness may impinge on another (Bigsby, *Edward Albee’s Morality Play* 72).

Robert Brustein dismissed Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* (1960) as "sexual-religious claptrap" (Brustein, *Krapp and A Little Claptrap* 22), as Jerry has all the attributes of a homosexual pervert: he is lonely, seductive, aggressive and rebellious. The play describes the life which man has created for him as a "solitary free passage" characterized by indifference towards others. The image of the zoo is a valid image for man who has come to accept loneliness as the norm of existence. Jerry pushes Peter onto a bench referring to him as a vegetable. Jerry's conversation with Peter expresses his homo-erotic fantasy to seduce Peter. Jerry is the lost animal of the Zoo World- sensitive and belligerent. Jerry's need to make contact is an inner compulsion, a psychological urge, an inevitable necessity of the neurotic. In the words of Harold Clurman: "But when he succeeds in approaching an animal or a person, it is always through a barrier of mistrust and in a tension of disgust, fear and despair" (Clurman, *The Nation* 13). His predicament is not metaphysical, religious or transcendental as in the case of the protagonists of Beckett, Pinter and Ionesco, rather he is the victim of a sick culture. Thus Jerry underlines the "absurdity of human existence consequent upon the failure of love, sex and communication. Indeed he is a harrowing portrait of a young man alienated from the human race", as Brooks Atkinson observed (Atkinson, *Broadway Scrapbook* 72).

The emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd was a radical movement as all the major playwrights of the continent were influenced by the stylistic techniques using incomprehensible plots, stark settings and unusually long pauses. Eugene Ionesco believed that life is terrifying because it is fundamentally absurd. Albee is popularly known as "the dramatist of loss" as his tragic vision deals with the psychological tensions of the youth who were the victims of the cruel society. He depicts the despair that looms large in the lives of western individuals. Albee was

deeply concerned with the isolation of an individual in society and the indifference of society towards the young people who were disappointed and depressed. There was a growing tendency of deep disillusionment as they lost the meaning and purpose in life. In contrast to the plays of the Victorians, the post-war theatre was more intensely psychological and it seemed to reflect a sense of bafflement. Beckett, Albee and Pinter came under the influence of Sartre and Camus as they wrote plays to depict the absurd situation of post War humanity. Delving into the depths of despair, Albee's plays represent the isolation, alienation and the morbid condition of modern man. Albee depicts a sterile world lacking in morals, compassion and love. In his plays people crave for human contact but men are selfish and cruel, lost in the money hunting culture. The plays of Albee question the dilemmas of the modern man who is forced to lead a caged existence. Albee's world is populated by characters who are lonely and desperate contemplating on suicide. They often experience rejection, fear, sense of loss and alienation.

Albee in *The Zoo Story* depicts an encounter between Jerry and Peter belonging to different social classes. In his first encounter with Peter, Jerry exhibits an intense hunger for relationship. Henry Hewes calls Jerry an outsider, "an obnoxious stranger" (Hewes, *Who's Afraid of Big Bad Broadway?* 32). The plot of the drama revolves around Jerry and Peter who confront each other in the Central Park of New York. Jerry has all the traits of a borderline personality; he is frustrated and depressed. Jerry accosts Peter when the latter is reading a book on a bench on a sunny Sunday afternoon in summer in a secluded corner of the Central Park. Like a sick patient, urged by his emotional restlessness, Jerry ambles up to Peter and announces:

“I’ve been to the Zoo... I said, I’ve been to the Zoo. MISTER, I’VE BEEN TO THE ZOO” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 12).

Jerry’s declaration confounds and baffles Peter who goes on asking again and again the mystery about the zoo but Jerry holds him in suspense not deliberately but out of his neurotic instability. The myth about the Zoo is exploded only when he narrates his harrowing experiences of the “The Lady and the Dog” in a neurotic volcano. Jerry’s insistence tone, his broken language, repetitions, pauses, incoherence in conversation—all these are the traits of a borderline protagonist ready to commit suicide. Jerry struggles desperately to strike up a conversation in a ridiculous manner. Jerry moves around Peter’s bench and asks direct questions in an incoherent language: “You’re married...How many children you got? ... Any pets?” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 16). The entire encounter of Jerry with Peter symbolizes the ironical parody of the quest of the traditional hero. The quest of a Shakespearean hero is for social and moral order but Jerry seeks the contact with Peter to release his psychic tensions. As soon as the conversation starts between the two, the differences in their socioeconomic backgrounds become more apparent. Peter belongs to the upper middle class society and is living a life of comfort and luxury. Jerry questions Peter about his family, job and even his salary to highlight the affluence. Peter shows his disinterestedness to communicate with a crank like Jerry. He considers Jerry to be a crank who disturbs his reading a book. The main conflict between Peter and Jerry is between the protagonist and the antagonist. Peter stands for everything related to American optimism. He lives in a world of complacency, conformity and is depicted as “the old pigeonhole bit” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 164). Jerry represents the lost intellectuals of America who are homeless. He belongs to a world in which

everyone is “a permanent transient” (177). In his *Introduction* Albee observed that the conflict between Peter and Jerry forms the core of the drama. His personal vision of the world becomes “an image of the communication loss” (12). Martin Esslin observes that Albee uses all the anti-theatrical tools to depict the conflict between Peter and Jerry in *The Zoo Story*. Albee satirizes through Peter “the absurdity of human life” (390). In Jerry and Peter we have the examples of “lonely people trapped in the callous universe” (392). Albee has given the realistic background of Peter and Jerry in simple and effective words. Jerry is a young boy in his “late thirties”; Peter is “neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely”. Peter’s face suggests that he was once “handsome” (158). Peter is dressed in the conventional way, representing the middle class. He is wearing tweeds, smoking a pipe and carrying horn-rimmed glasses. Allan Lewis observes in his book *American Plays and Playwrights* (1970) that Peter also holds a knife symbolizing the “meeting of two separate worlds in the heart of a modern city” (Lewis 82).

In the beginning, Peter is quite at peace reading a book. He is settled and is leading a comfortable life. He has all the material amenities of life. He becomes uneasy on hearing Jerry’s story. Peter does not want to talk to Jerry whose appearance looks imposing and disturbing. Peter lives in a posh apartment in the East Seventies, while Jerry “lives in the West Side of New York City” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 177). Jerry is aggressive while Peter is calm and docile. He is forced to listen to Jerry. The scenery is peaceful as there is no tension on the face of Peter. The Central Park is a place of the recreation of mind, far from the madding crowd. It is ironical that in such a calm place, surrounded by nature, Peter and Jerry have to fight for a place on the bench. The bench of the Park becomes an envious symbol of

their honour. Peter is possessive as he doesn't allow Jerry to sit on the bench. The empty picture frames that Jerry keeps are significant as they symbolize the emptiness in his life. Jerry lost his parents and his mother's sister looked after Jerry. Jerry finds himself alone in the harsh world. But there is no burden on Jerry's mind, for him the loss of parents is nothing more than the loss of a purse or of furniture. He is quite insensitive and indifferent to what Jerry says.

Moreover, Jerry's story about his landlady's dog reveals much about his approach to social interaction. Jerry observes a parallel between human relationship with animals and their relationship with each other. "If you can't deal with people", Jerry explains, "You have to make a start somewhere. With animals" (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 13). The image of the Zoo is the most effective in the drama and Albee depicts the corrosion of self of modern American man through this powerful image. Jerry says: "I went to the Zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals, and the way animals exist with each other, and with people too" (34). Peter and Jerry talk about the useless things of life and express their neurological anxiety through lifeless and dead images. They banter about the set of pornographic playing cards that Jerry keeps in his apartment. All of a sudden Jerry changes the subject and tells Peter about his visit to the Zoo. Jerry describes about his landlady who is a drunken and idiotic woman. She even tried to seduce him. Jerry narrates the story of his landlady's dog. Peter is not in a mood to listen to the story but Jerry forces him to hear all about the lady and the dog. In Peter's apartment everybody lives in pairs suggesting companionship. There are daughters, cats, parakeets but in Jerry's world everybody is isolated from the other. In the course of the play Jerry behaves more and more like a neurotic. Jerry is a "permanent transient" (177). Jerry is a strange

crank; his only property is the two empty picture frames of his father and mother. The frames are empty because he has “no feeling about any of it” (181). Jerry is proud of his own world of animals; he lives in his own little Zoo. He refers to a horrifying and decadent dog. This dog is owned by an old landlady who is sexual and seductive. Albee has described the perversion and degradation of Jerry who has become an untamed “animal” (177). It is pertinent to note that Jerry lives in a tormented house, his dwelling place is “an underworld described in the old myths” (170). The dog of his landlady symbolizes decay, sterility and horror. Jerry also owns a pack of pornographic playing-cards. Jerry describes the absurdity of his existence giving an account of his carnal relationships thus:

“I wonder if it’s sad that I never see the little ladies more than once. I’ve never been able to have sex with, or, how is it put?... make love to anybody more than once... And now; oh, do I love the little ladies; really, I love them. For about an hour” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 24).

The old woman and the dog describe their spiritual decay and moral perversion. The old woman and the dog are leading a hellish life. The old woman is “fat, ugly, mean, stupid, unwashed, misanthropic, and cheap” (168). Peter is baffled by the neurotic communication of Jerry as he shouts “I DO NOT UNDERSTAND!” to Jerry (179). In the beginning of the plot, Albee introduces the destructive image of the knife which is used to kill Jerry. Jerry feels lonely throughout the drama; his quest for contact is achieved through his murder symbolizing the need for suicide. The theme of suicide is not new in the Theatre of the Absurd. Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter used the tools of death and suicide to depict the anxiety and absurdity of the life of the protagonists. In the drama Jerry can make contact with Peter only through

death. The law of nature is reversed. Jerry is passing through a period of neurosis and is seen restless. Lewis observes that Jerry's violent death, impaled on his own knife held by Peter, also marks the end of a "macabre love affair of latent homosexual relations" (83) Albee calls Jerry a "self-confessed homosexual" (167). Jerry shows no reluctance whatsoever about recalling his own private life. He is not married but apparently has had plenty of one night sex experience with women and once he found solace and comfort in homosexual perversion: "I met at least twice a day with the park superintendent's son...may be just with sex" (30). Jerry gives an account of his neighbours-"The Puerto Rican family that entertains a lot: the woman who cries determinedly all day: the homosexual who plucks his eyebrow, which he does with Buddhist concentration" (26). This obviously reveals Jerry's neurotic loneliness as he emerges an antithesis of Peter. George Wellworth aptly observes thus:

Nothing protects him, and consequently, he feels the full agony of Adamov's cripples or any number of other characters from the current avant-garde theatre" (Wellworth, *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox* 276).

Albee was abandoned by his mother, neglected by his father and orphaned at twelve. The same life was led by Jerry who has been completely on his own from the day of his High School graduation. Indeed, he seems to be drifting in a hostile void governed by the forces of the "Savage God". Again to quote George Wellworth:

Albee sees society... as a part of Chinese wall protecting these within from the barbican hordes outside. Occasionally, though, one of the inhabitants of the artificial enclosures inadvertently strays too near the line and is overcome by an intruder like Jerry (Wellworth, *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox* 276).

As he proceeds with his conversation with Peter, Jerry is in the grip of a crisis. The purposelessness of his life has begun to manifest itself in his appearance. He is dressed not poorly but carelessly. His body has “begun to go fat”. The entire action of the play consists of conversation which culminates in an outburst of violence. Of course, Jerry does most of the talking; here is a case of “prowling” restlessly around the stage to get release from the neurotic obsession. In the words of Anne Paolucci, “Jerry’s persistent questioning of Peter and his tireless energy are unmistakable signs of a hysterical state, a longing to commit suicide” (Paolucci, *From Tension to Tonic* 40). Sometimes, it becomes difficult to find any relevance in what Jerry says or relates, for he is full of contradictions, irony and paradoxes. Charles R. Lyons compared Brecht’s *Im Dickicht Der Staedte* and Albee’s *The Zoo Story* and discovered that both “Jerry and Shlink’s inner anxiety compels them to make contact with the strangers to get release from their oppressed mind” (Lyons, *Two Projections of the Isolation of the Human Soul* 138). Shlink’s boxing match and Jerry’s “course” is the quest of the neurotic hero. Jerry’s quest for life leads him to nothingness as he admits “I took down to the village so I could walk all the way up Fifth Avenue to the Zoo” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 25).

Jerry’s mental paralysis is further revealed in his story of “Jerry and the Dog” which is a rehearsal of an anguished cry for contact with something external to

his own consciousness. He descends to the world of animals in despair in his sordid quest for identity and when he finds himself lost, he longs for suicide. The ugly black dog, who guards the entrance of his squalid rooming house, selects Jerry, from the other roomers, as the object of his animosity. As both Jerry and the dog become suspicious of the appearance of friendship, it becomes distorted in both their minds and gets associated with attempted death and destruction. After telling Peter the story, Jerry feels somewhat relieved from his neurotic tensions. Jerry decides to deal with the dog in his own neurotic manner: “I decided: First, I’ll kill the dog with kindness, and if that doesn’t work...I’ll just kill him” (37).

Language in Albee’s plays is clichés ridden and marked by emptiness and insignificant repetition, which mirrors a void existence. Action in Albee’s plays carries the teaching of existentialism, and the meaning it realizes through engaging in purposeful action transcends the pessimistic deadlock of the Absurd theatre. Violence in action embodies Artaud’s advocating of a “Cruel Theatre” which returns to the theatre the wonder and force of a lost cosmic power. The realistic style of setting, plot and structure reflects the dominance of realism on American theatre. All the symptoms outlined by Dr. Karen Horney such as restlessness, anxiety and paranoia are found in Jerry. Jerry decides to deal with Peter in his own neurotic manner. The speeches of Jerry are loaded with incoherent images since he is a fit case of a borderline. Consider for instance the following speech of Jerry:

“A person has to have some way of dealing with SOMETHING. If not with people...if not with people... SOMETHING. With a bed, with a cockroach, with a mirror... no, that’s too hard, that’s one of the last steps. With a cockroach, with a ... with a ... With a carpet, a roll of toilet paper” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 30).

Since the entire fabric of Jerry's harrowing experiences reveals his tortured existence, the audience find themselves, drawn into a "nightmare". By the time he meets Peter, he has thought long and deep about the way people are kept apart by barriers inside themselves as well as outside. Left with no alternative, he must make contact "WITH ANIMALS!" (42). Jerry's broken speech, his tone and physical movements convey his neurotic anxiety to escape from the world. Jerry is at the crossroad of life, he is aware that the end is near as he explains the love-hate theme in his story. Jerry is silent when he ends his long story symbolizing his suicide. His silence is quite effective indicating his tragic fall. Peter is also "silent", "disturbed" and "numb" at the end of the story. He rejected Jerry's emotional encounters. The long speech of Jerry has no impact on Peter; he is baffled and bewildered as the disjointed utterances make him sick. Like Hamm in *Endgame*, Jerry has his morbid "course", which brings him to the realization of human isolation. Jerry struggles to break his isolation but Peter is adamant. At last Jerry is grotesquely fatigued at the end of the story. Jerry is exhausted and for the first time he sits down on the bench besides Peter. He observes that he has annoyed Peter. Suddenly Jerry "tickles", "pokes", "punches" and "pushes" Peter off the bench. Jerry plays the last card and opens a knife and tosses before Peter. In desperation Jerry grabs Peter by the collar, slaps him and spits on his face and drives Peter to rush over to pick the knife. Then with a heavy sigh Jerry runs into the knife and kills himself. Mita Mitra in her essay *The Role of Silence in Edward Albee's Plays* analyses the scene thus:

Taunted by Jerry, Peter denies in his response that the possession of the bench is indeed a "question of honour". But his anger at Jerry's encroachment contradicts his statement, and his effort to protect the

bench implies that it has assumed an abstract meaning for him. In his turn, Jerry manipulates this “Absurd” confrontation over a bench to deflect attention from the despair he feels before he forces Peter to pick up a knife and then runs into it (Mitra 31).

Jerry uses the tool of suicide to survive in modern society. There is a blend of mockery, contempt and desperation in his long speech but at the end he does feel the sense of hopeless alienation: “Oh... my... God (He is dead)” (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 61). At last Jerry’s illusions about life are broken when he embraces death at the end of the play: “I came unto you... and you have comforted me. Dear Peter” (61). Ronald Hayman observes that “in Jerry’s final death, his acute neurological tension is released in a “homosexual contact” (Hayman, *Edward Albee* 8). His last words express not the jubilation of a victor but the humble thanks of a sick and wounded animal. His fall is the most unheroic fall of a modern man afflicted with fears, doubts, anxiety, isolation and neurotic despair. Jerry’s suicide itself is symbolical of his defeated personality, being an escape into another unworldly illusion. Jerry is like O’Neill’s Yank - a desperately isolated outcast, a victim of nervous disorder - who struggles in vain for acknowledgement. Both visit the Zoo to contemplate their isolation and reach the conclusion that men are animals, and that beneath the illusion of civilization they still have the tendency of killing.

Albee seems to imply that, faced with a mysterious cosmic order, man finds it difficult to face the situation and his only choice is suicide. Having been reduced by Darwin to the product of natural selection, by Marx to the victim of economic determinism, and by Freud to the slave of unconscious forces, man has no height from which to fall. The sordid predicament of Jerry is that he remains rootless till

the end, and instead of achieving heroic dimensions, he commits suicide. Jerry's fall being the fall of a neurotic patient, it is to be pitied and regretted and not to be emulated or envied in any heroic manner. Thus, *The Zoo Story* dramatizes not heroism, but depersonalization of self through neurosis, the loss of self, the deflation of the protagonist. To quote Anita Maria Stenz:

For Albee, Jerry represents a wasted life. The question which the author is stridently asking in this play is in fact whether the one man is any less depersonalized than the other. For the author the polarization of Jerry and Peter represents man's alienation from himself (Stenz, *Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss* 8).

There are several psychological, sociological, and personal factors which urge Jerry to impale on his own knife held by Peter. There are many theories on suicidal behaviour in terms of the paranoid process. Freud's theory of internalized aggression and depression is quite relevant in case of Jerry. The message of the play is very clear. Death is a scary reality that we all must face. It is an inevitable event. Suicide is the intentional killing of oneself. The rationale behind the suicide of Jerry is quite simple. He was fed up with the alienation of life and the lack of communication. The speeches of Jerry are loaded with the images of death and destruction; the references to ferocious animals, cats, dog, Zoo are significant. Jerry commits suicide; his action gives solution to his severe physical or psychological dilemma. His suicide results from a number of things. Suicide is not a simple behaviour; it is the product of psychological ailments. Most clinicians agree that suicide is the result of internal psychic pressures. Freud in his *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1910) has also discussed the various causes of suicide. Man is

always under two basic drives of love and death. Psychological reasons include the internal factors related to the psyche of the characters and these include personality, character, temperament, emotional stability etc. Sociological reasons constitute the external factors like family, social relationships and society itself. The most common psychological causes are depression, schizophrenia, and neurotic behaviour. The psychology of suicide is rooted in depression. Depression is the primary motivation for suicide. It is a mood disturbance which is characterized by feelings of sadness and despair. Jerry suffers from depression and is the victim of mental anxiety. Depression can become an abnormal emotional state. Jerry is a depressed person who thinks of himself in a very negative way. He views his future with despair. He feels himself to be responsible for all his problems and considers himself to be a failure. He starts believing that he is inferior to Peter.

Samuel Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* using the tool of suicide in a different way. The difference between Beckett and Albee is very clear; the protagonists of Beckett are weak and fragile lacking the potential to action. They only talk about suicide but don't actually perform the action. Vladimir and Estragon are deflated characters suffering from the corrosion of self. Godot is a mysterious figure about whom they both know nothing at all. Their waiting continues throughout the play and it suggests very clearly that the two live estranged from a state of grace. While waiting, they find it very difficult to pass the time. They get bored and use different ways to pass their time until Godot comes. They play verbal games, do exercises, exchange their hats, call each other's names and go on peering into hats and complaining about boots. Their stagnant life is devoid of development and it makes them fed up with their situations sometimes. They are unable to bring

themselves round to the decision whether they should stop waiting or continue like this. From the conversation with the messenger boy sent by Godot, they form two different opinions about Godot. Vladimir and Estragon conclude that Godot is mysterious. Thus, both the characters are in a state of great confusion and non-action. They think that Godot will punish them if they stop waiting for him. So they are left with no other option but to go on waiting for the person whose arrival they think will miraculously improve their lives as he will provide them food, the place to live in, and above all their lost identity. They are the deflated personalities who find their identities in crisis; they don't know who they are, where they are to go, where they live and what to do at all. Their anxiety, hopelessness of life and helplessness in their undesirable situations are leading them to think of suicide. Vladimir and Estragon think of suicide, when they feel devastated because there is no point for living. They are the victims of self-criticism and self-hatred which are the factors leading to depression and suicide. Vladimir and Estragon too feel intense frustration and disappointment when Godot, to whom all their hopes and life are related, remains only a mystery never to be resolved. All this sets the process of thinking about suicide in motion. Both the protagonists are waiting for a meaning that will save them from their pain, ugliness of life and emptiness of existence. Perhaps this meaning is Godot whom they don't know. Godot is always promised but he never recognizably appears on the stage. Their life is thus a constant waiting. They have lost their interest in life and perceive themselves in a negative way: Feeling unable to bear the torture of their poignant situation, Estragon shouts, "I can't go on like this" (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 87).

David Malan, a psychologist, suggests that man commits suicide under the force of internal turmoil. This means that the internal or psychological factors like character, personality, temperament and emotional stability which are often to be inherited, contribute more to the instinct to commit suicide. The suicide may be regarded as a personal factor. Jerry, Vladimir and Estragon are suffering from loss of personality and emotional stability. They don't consider themselves to be the active members of society. They are destined to wail repeatedly saying 'What will we do?' There occurs the answer to their cries. The solution is to commit suicide that will put an end to all their problems, sorrows and agonies. They are the victims of the pitiless forces of destiny which neither allows them to live happily and peacefully nor to die and achieve salvation. Jerry, Estragon and Vladimir confront terrible loneliness, helplessness, the cruelty of man and God, and the absence of God. Finding no solutions and answers to their questions, they get fed up with their suffering, boredom and depression and consequently contemplate committing suicide. Suicide will provide an end to their lives along with their never-ending sufferings and pains. They opt to commit suicide as a means for escaping from self. Dominated by their failures and negative aspects of their personality, they find themselves unworthy of improving and reforming their present situation and thus reaching an ideal one in future. So torn by the psychological traumas and despair, they reach the point of ending their lives. However, further, it is to be noted that their attempt to commit suicide is not an intentional and serious one. While thinking about suicide, Jerry, Vladimir and Estragon have in their mind just a way to pass the time or speed up the passage of time. Suicide for them, therefore, is just another diversion, whose consequences they don't bother about or can't fathom.

Albee and Beckett have dramatized the theme of suicide in their plays. In the plays of Beckett there is only discussion of suicide but no actual death or suicide takes place. Suicide arises from a fit of boredom. Activity of waiting itself is a psychological torture. Estragon and Vladimir wait for Godot in an endless manner; they get exasperated and weary and think of committing suicide. The scenery and the environment is harsh; dreary and pessimistic. There is no hope and faith in the world of Albee and Beckett. There is only a lonely tree in the world and a weeping willow. Vladimir and Estragon think of hanging themselves but at last they change their mind as the rope is too small. By the second day they forget about suicide and start waiting once again. Vladimir and Estragon just discuss the suicide issue but don't actually die as they are too weak to act. But in *The Zoo Story*, the suicide actually is dramatized because Albee feels that suicide is the only alternative left for modern man to escape from the malaise of life. So here the point arises that if both Estragon and Vladimir are living a virtual death, a life worse than hell, then dying will be nothing but more the same. Vladimir and Estragon remain in the void or vacuum. They are the victims of false awareness of their lives. Their thinking has become totally negative and destructive. They are drawing themselves towards nihilism which is further converting them into perverts. The result is that they are the defeated ones who have such a mindset that has brought them to a climax where they are compelled to negate their own personalities. They realize that the only solution to their existential struggle is to end their lives; they are bound to think that death could be the way to achieve happiness, illumination and deliverance. To add more to their poignant situation, each time they think about suicide, they find themselves not fully equipped with the requisites. In the very beginning, when

Vladimir and Estragon think of the only willow tree under which they are waiting as a means to hang themselves, that very moment, they realize that the tree will not be able to hang both of them as its branches will not be able to bear the weight of Vladimir:

Estragon: “Let’s hang ourselves immediately!”

Vladimir: “From a bough? I wouldn’t trust it” (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 9).

Further Estragon explains that if he will try to hang himself first, no doubt the thin bough of the willow tree will support his weight but there is the possibility that it will not bear the weight of Vladimir and will break and he will remain alone in this world to suffer. So they drop the idea of hanging themselves from the tree under which they were waiting. They decide, “Don’t let’s do anything. It’s safer” (10). They relate their suffering and anxiety to the willow tree under which they are waiting. Estragon finds that there are no leaves on the tree and it further helps to intensify their anxiety and pessimism. Through the symbol of the willow tree, Beckett has portrayed the unbearable conditions of the lives of both Vladimir and Estragon. Here, it is suggested that death sets a person or even a non-living object free from all the worldly fevers and frets. Through the words of Vladimir and Estragon, it is symbolically suggested that one is bound to go through all the tensions, depressions, anxieties, sorrows, sufferings and agonies until he or she is breathing in this mortal world, once he steps out of this world, he is free from all the above said torturing traumas. There is no more weeping when you are dead. Through the symbol of the tree without leaves, the barrenness of the life of the characters in the modern era is suggested. The life of Vladimir and Estragon is

constantly a series of pains and sufferings which seem to be continuing till they embrace death because all the joys, fascinations, enchantments and beauties of life mean nothing to them. They are destined to go along with the ugliness of their life, which further leads to their pessimism and ultimately thinking about suicide as a possible solution to escape hellish absurdity. Beckett and Albee have dramatized the absurdity; anxiety and the psychological traumas of modern man who is leading a life in death. He is burdened with the feelings of guilt and thinks of escaping from the harsh realities of life by committing suicide. Hamlet and Macbeth were great tragic figures. They are admired and remembered as their tragic actions were heroic. But the tragic fall of Jerry is absurd and despicable. Like normal human beings, they have grand aspirations, but they never are able to achieve them.

Freud observes that suicide is often the result of an unachieved goal or dysfunctional relationship. The protagonists are trapped in a painful, void-like existence in which suffering is commonplace and death is comparable to escape. The characters are destined to suffer. They are not even allowed freedom from their terrible sufferings. They are deprived of family, job, reputation, and friends. Beckett's chief concern lies in depriving his characters of these pleasures and needs like the will to live. Life for the characters in the play is so awesome that for them, the pain of living is equated to the pain of dying. Both birth and death are inevitable in life. For Beckett and Albee, death is an easy way out because it provides rest from the burdens of life.

The Christian theology that man is born in sin and has to be saved is referred to in the drama of Beckett and Albee. Birth is considered to be both a beginning and an end. It marks the beginning of pain and the end of peace. The characters go on

discovering this peace throughout their life and ultimately they consider death as the only way out. The miserable plight, the depression and anxiety never provide them even a single moment of peace. They suffer continue restlessness and mental as well as physical pains. Vladimir and Estragon constantly strive for social recognition, social-status, a wish to be praised, and a sense of belongingness and they remind themselves that they have lost their rights of being members of society. This disappointment, social environment sets the suicidal process in motion. Perceiving themselves to be deficient, comparing themselves with a standard, such as other people's expectations, they randomly think about suicide and hanging themselves, but each time their attempt to commit suicide remains unsuccessful because of their lack of courage and also due to lack of proper equipment for hanging:

Vladimir: "Let's go."

Estragon: "Wait, there's my belt."

Vladimir: "It's too short" (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 86).

It implies the poignancy and suffering of their lives. Edwin Shneidman, in an essay, explains that most suicides are marked by an ambivalence towards life and death. Estragon feels devastated that he and Vladimir don't have a rope with the required length to hang themselves from the tree. Thus every unfulfilled effort to finish their life adds more terrible agonies but along with this it is also reflected that there is always a hope somewhere though in a diminutive form that they will be saved by Godot. Vladimir and Estragon are not courageous enough to decide themselves whether they should drop waiting or not. They have the fear that if they stop waiting for Godot, he will punish them:

Estragon: “And if we dropped him?”

Vladimir: “He’d punish us” (86).

So somewhere in their minds, Estragon and Vladimir still hope that Godot will surely come. Even on the verge of death, they change their mood to die and give different but nonsensical excuses for their not executing the plan to commit suicide. The other reason for not committing suicide in a realistic context is that they are still having the image of God in them. They are still having the enlightenment in them that committing suicide will be a sin and it will deprive them of the love of God. Farber has his own theory of suicide and states that the psychologically damaged personalities confronted by deprived situations are most likely to commit suicide. He notes the role of hope and its loss as the main causes of suicide. Jerry, Vladimir and Estragon suffer from loss of hope and are deprived of the essentials of life. Lucky, Pozzo, Vladimir and Estragon - all the four characters - are psychically isolated from one another and from the callous world. Their mental disorders, depression, schizophrenic tendencies produce distress or disability that debar their normal development. Their depressive moods further lead them into psychotic symptoms such as delusions and hallucinations. Peter and Jerry are the victims of schizophrenia. These tendencies contribute to the loss of interest in their lives and to think about suicide. Most commonly, the schizophrenic tendencies manifest themselves in auditory hallucinations, disorganized speech or thinking. Estragon too suffers from nightmares. He is very fond of sleeping. But in sleep, he is often disturbed by the horrible dreams. He wakes with a start, jumps up, casts about wildly.

Vladimir and Estragon have a hope which sustains them in their harsh existence. But Jerry and Peter have no hope in life. They opt for death as a meaningful escape from the harsh and absurdist realities of existence. Vladimir and Estragon attain inevitable patience and enduring qualities. Waiting in itself is a divine activity:

Estragon: "Let's go."

Vladimir: "We can't."

Estragon: "Why not?"

Vladimir: "We are waiting for Godot" (Beckett, *Godot* 63).

The characters feel estranged and alienated in their contemporary society and its fast demanding nature with so called development at a very rapid rate. This is why both Vladimir and Estragon tend to be self-critical and have a low self-esteem which is drifting them towards contemplating suicide. The sociologist Benjamin Wolman observes that estrangement and alienation are the main causes for growing suicide. Vladimir and Estragon are living without any social relation or ties and moreover their loss of self enhanced their thinking of committing suicide.

The characters of Beckett and Albee suffer from the corrosion of self as they are the deflated personalities. Mac Gowran's distinction between 'distress' which constitutes extreme pain and suffering and 'despair' that is to be without hope, is a valid one. Albee and Beckett often give situations full of despair. Beckett's characters are sick and decadent and most of them appear old and in pain. Jerry in *The Zoo Story* gets killed to escape from the cruelties of the harsh society and in Beckett's world, it is left to the characters to opt for life or death though along with

this, they are constantly prohibited to decide which way should definitely be opted. Vladimir and Estragon don't commit suicide, they escape from it because of an iota of inner strength they possess being the children of God. Though even estranged from society, they are still human beings. They find some essence in their lives because from the very beginning till the end they are shown waiting for Godot, a constant hope of their life which when fulfilled will revolutionize their lives and there will no longer be any suffering and pain. Their lives then will be full of happiness without any fevers or frets:

Vladimir: "We'll hang ourselves tomorrow." (Pause) "Unless Godot comes."

Estragon: "And if he comes."

Vladimir: "We'll be saved" (Beckett, *Godot* 87).

Both Estragon and Vladimir have somewhere in their minds the hope to be saved from their awful life. Each day they postpone their completion of suicide expecting Godot, their saviour to come and drag them out of their poignant situation. Pozzo laughs at Vladimir and Estragon because he thinks they are hardly human beings. He doesn't consider them to be belonging to human race as he considers himself. He denies admitting that both the tramps have an image of God within them. Vladimir and Estragon don't commit suicide till the end but their life is more hellish than that of Jerry. Their everlasting hope is belied and they are bound to suffer an eternal pain in life. Impatiently but continuously they are waiting for Godot in a meaningless manner: "VLADIMIR: It's Godot! At Last! Gogo! It's Godot! We're saved! Let's go and meet him." (65).

To conclude, Albee belongs to the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd, like Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter. His *The Zoo Story* depicts the poignant experiences of a caged man bound by the wheel of destiny, pitted against circumstances and longing to end his meaningless life. Jerry is a caged man. He lives like the caged animals of the Zoo. He lives physically but he is dead spiritually. Jerry, Vladimir and Estragon are lost animals who live in the Zoo of the American society. The plays of Albee and Beckett constantly suffer from extreme pain, misfortune and calamity. There is a constant lust for death in them along with an equally constant zest for living. It is a very strange paradox portrayed in the characters of the play *Waiting for Godot*. The characters don't have any clearly defined path to tread. They are left free to opt either for life or death. Vladimir and Estragon don't commit suicide but their living is worse than life as they are on the end of the road and like Sisyphus they are bound by the wheel of time and fate.

Chapter 6

Psychoanalytical Analysis of George-Martha Relationship: Neurotic Games of Fun and Corrosion of Self in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Mrs. Virginia Woolf was a trend setter in the domain of fiction in the post-World War period who became famous in the world for her *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *A Room of One's own* (1929). Woolf's life was characterized by periods of madness and it is not surprising that she depicted the poignant experiences of the contemporary people evolving the technique of stream of consciousness. Her protagonists suffer from the cancer of alienation and neurotic pressures. Edward Albee examined the themes of breakdown of marriage, love and sex in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) depicting the corrosion of self of Martha, George, Nick and Honey. Walt Disney's *Three Little Pigs* (1933) gives the song *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?* Albee borrowed the title for his play and changed it as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The title excited great interest among the critics. The title of the play is a pun on the song of Walt Disney. Albee substituted the name of the prominent British writer Virginia Woolf. Interestingly, Martha and George sing this song many times in the play. Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* launched the movement of feminism in the 20th century. Woolf's essay challenges the contemporary patriarchal society of England. Edward Albee's play depicts George and Martha revolting against the traditional values of the American Dream through truth and illusion. Edward Albee's comedy destroys the idea of the "American Dream". Both texts *A Room of*

One's Own and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* deal with the issue of the conflict between truth and illusion. In all the scenes of the drama, Albee's goal is to reveal the truth about their relationships and marriage by breaking down the illusions the characters have created. Albee employs the tools of sarcasm and cynicism in his plays.

Albee borrowed heavily from the plays of Ionesco, Genet and Beckett. He was greatly influenced by the use of all the stylistic techniques of the drama of Absurd and found them to be effective techniques to explore the inner turmoil of his protagonists in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Paolucci observes that Albee made many innovations in the dramatic domain as he exploited all the sources of the traditional and contemporary theatre:

Albee's experimentation in allegory, metaphorical clichés, grotesque parody, hysterical humour, brilliant wit, literary allusion, religious undercurrents, Freudian reversals, irony as irony, here for the first time appear whole in a mature and completely satisfying dramatic work (Paolucci, *From Tension to Tonic* 45).

The American theatre of the post World War II era voices an excruciating mood of nihilistic despair as the modern man protests against a life that has been drained off ultimate meaning. The goal of Albee is to expose the deepest layer of human conflicts. George and Martha are a true match of opposites and they rely on the art of aggression. For Martha aggression is the most powerful tool to strike through masks and to make contact with George. Aggression is the perfect way to strip off illusions and to break the web of lies and frauds. Albee's protagonists are

reduced to interrogation marks in a world in which everything is problematic and uncertain. Filled with moral despair, they live in an illusive world to escape from the harsh realities of life. George feels homeless and redundant in an inscrutable universe. He distrusts truth, justice and love and negates all moral and religious values which have been sustaining the human civilization. No wonder, the plot structure of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* depicts the tragic process of the deflation of self. Albee shatters all myths and illusions in this drama. Albee examines and probes the inner world of the protagonists depicting the conflicts between sexuality and spirit, good and evil, matter and mind, the world and the unconsciousness. According to Carl Jung, neurosis is essentially a matter of schism between the individual's conscious and unconscious desires—"a dissociation of personality due to the existence of complexes" (Jung, *Psychology and Literature* 188). For Alfred Adler, the social set up is the basis of the neurotic conflict. While Freud sees in a neurotic very little of social inclination, he is bent on establishing his supremacy in society-an anxiety that springs from a sense of inferiority. Adler contends that "every neurosis can be understood as an attempt to free oneself from a feeling of inferiority in order to gain a feeling of superiority" (Adler, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* 23). Neo Freudians like Eric Fromm and Karen Horney have emphasized "anxiety", "adult experience", "cultural influence on the individual" as the dominant factors of neurosis. The neurotic protagonists like Jerry or George long to enter into "phantasy of life". They seek mechanisms of escape like sado-masochism, destructiveness and conformity. For Jerry the tool of suicide is very much workable; George and Martha manufacture illusions and withdraw into their self created cocoon. R.D. Laing observes that "the term schizoid refers to an

individual, the totality of whose experience is split in two ways. In the first place, there is rent in his relation with his world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation with himself" (Laing, *The Divided Self* 8).

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? was first staged at the Billy Rose Theatre, New York, on October 13, 1962. Richard Schechner, the editor of the Tulane Drama Review greeted it as "a persistent escape into morbid fantasy". W.D Maxwell found it "a filthy play". The staging of the play was a grand success as the audience was spellbound. Saul Colin admitted to having "never spent such an emotionally and physically upsetting evening at a theatre". Some critics levelled charges of misogyny, homo-sexuality and lack of originality. The critics observed that Albee's play is an imitation of Strindberg's *The Bond*.

Despite the scathing criticism, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?* became a popular drama since it indicted the entire American civilization which suffers from emotional and spiritual sterility. Albee dramatizes the harrowing existence of a neurotic and frustrated history Professor who teaches in a small American college. George leads a lonely and desperate life struggling in a grotesque manner to live through illusions and phantasy. The plot of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* is full of anguish, frustration and defeat. George and Martha are cut off from the old securities as they no longer visualize a harmonious social relationship in a society. The ideas of Darwin push George and Martha as well as Nick and Honey onward, their shared lack of clear purpose is the main focus of the drama. Sex, violence, perversion, moral and spiritual damnation are the main themes of the play. George is dramatized as a lonely individual, craving for the love and affection of a son but whose false illusions result into the corrosion of his self. Albee dramatizes him when he finds

himself in a crisis. He has two possible ways of acting either to face reality or to retreat into illusion. His passionate tendency to cling to neurotic illusions dehumanizes his personality and debilitates his sensibility.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a psychological drama. The main focus of Albee is on George and Martha relationship. The textual analysis of the plot of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* compels the readers to seriously think of the dilemmas of life. Albee has brought many issues into the limelight. Many critics are of the opinion that the play is a psychological "case study" of married couples who are leading a meaningless life in the contemporary American society. The plot of the play depicts the traumatic life of two couples- George and Martha and Nick and Honey. George married Martha twenty three years ago and Nick is a Biology Professor who married Honey recently. The life of the old couple is contrasted with the young couple and in a way George and Martha see in the new couple their past life. Albee uses the elements of wit and irony to expose and ridicule the corrupted American family institution. Nick married Honey for money, Martha's father also married his second wife for money. George says "Martha got money because of Martha's father's second wife... not Martha's mother, but after Martha's mother died... was a very old lady with warts who was very rich." (Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 109). Albee takes up the problem of love and sex in family relationship; he depicts the psychological tensions of the married people who run after money at the cost of real love. In fact corruption has polluted the married life of the Americans. The family ties are crumbling very fast because of the supremacy of money culture.

The psychologists and sociologists believe that modern age is the age of social and moral dilemmas. Carl Gustav Jung observes thus: “Western culture teaches us that every man is the unique, isolated ‘self’” (Jung, *Psychology and Literature* 20). People are getting away from their old cultural norms, the alienation from culture results into fragmentation of society. C.G. Jung called it the “collective unconsciousness” symbolizing wisdom, sense and purpose. When man cuts himself from the collective consciousness, he is filled with fear, anxiety and uncertainty. The play may be described as an allegory of American society; it is a poetic image of the emptiness and sterility of society. The plot of the play is a complex ritual on the pattern of Genet. The main focus is on the dilemmas of a couple who struggle to live despite the fissures in relations. It is an attempt of a couple to face life in its reality stripping off all illusions. Maria Stenz rightly says:

Edward Albee is primarily concerned with the nature of the bond between husband and wife. He explored the absurdities and dilemmas faced by the husband and wife. Martha is a barren lady and George is an impotent; Albee has explored the destructive forces which wreck the happiness of the couple (Stenz, *Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss* 3).

Albee projects his main protagonist who struggles for his self-realization in the world full of illusions. Alan Schneider directed the play for the first time and he found out that “What Albee wanted was the image of a womb or a cave” (Schneider *New York Times* 39). The plot centres on the “games of deceit and betrayal” which George and Martha play to escape from the neurotic tensions of their life. “What a

dump!’” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 7) is the first disgusting remark of Martha that sets the tone of the drama while George is reading Spengler’s book *The Decline of the West*.

The play begins on a very soft note. Nick is a new Biology Professor. Martha has invited him and his wife, Honey, for drinks. After Nick and Honey arrive, George and Martha begin ridiculing their twenty years of marriage, violently and brutally. Both feel that the marriage was a failure. George and Martha indulge in typical games to pass time and to entertain each other. Berne and Harris in the book *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (1973) defined the psychological games of George and Martha. The players do not join voluntarily, but are lured into the game. Each game has certain set rules and nobody dares to violate these rules. They play their parts without even realizing that a game is going on. Garff Wilson wrote his book *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre* (1973) to explore the nature and significance of the games played by George and Martha. He describes the play as an all night drinking party during which two couples ruthlessly rip each other to shreds.

Malkin wrote *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama: From Handke to Shepard* (1992) and wrote that the games “demand little action, only an abundance of verbal energy” (Malkin 165) and to win or to lose a game depends upon one’s level of verbal mastery. In the opinion of Roudane, George and Martha are “two connoisseurs of verbal dueling” (Roudane, *Understanding Albee* 45) and in Ruby Cohn’s words they are experts in “sodomasochistic language” (Cohn, *Theatre of Discord* 217). George and Martha treat language “as a power tool, to be controlled and possessed” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 171).

Albee was familiar with such games which symbolize the different forms of pathological relationships. The fun and games are not new to Albee alone. The other dramatists like Harold Pinter, Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams have used this dramatic device to portray the inner turbulence of the protagonists. Pinter's *Caretaker*, *Betrayal* and *The Birthday Party* are interesting plays dealing with such situations. The motive behind is to depict the absurdity of human situation and the agonizing despair of man confronted with identity crisis in society. Tennessee Williams wrote his famous drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* to depict the world of false illusions of Blanche. Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* also portrays different forms of entrapment in pathological relationships. George and Martha indulge in delusive fun and games. George and Martha rely on the value of self-delusion and believe that it is the only source of their happiness and survival. Laing in his book *Self and Others, Sanity and Madness* observes thus:

Illusion is a technique to deceive oneself under a strong wish. It is an expression of traumatic experiences. Collusion is a game played by two or more people whereby they deceive themselves. It is a game involving mutual self-deception. So collusion is necessarily a transpersonal or interpersonal process (Laing 98).

According to Roudane, Albee propagates the theme that the "audience must enjoy their pipe-dreams if they want to but realize the meaning and significance of self deception and destructive illusion in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*" (Roudane, *Understanding Albee* 109). Cohn contends that the games included in this play- "Humiliate the Host", "Get the Guests", "Hump the hostess", "Bringing up Baby"- suggest a miniature society. Toby Zinman argues that the plot of the play

shows in “the dysfunctional family, a subject American drama has been in love with from the beginning” (Zinman, *Edward Albee* 39). Albee virulently satirizes the American culture, American Dream, the success myth and the image of American womanhood. The institution of marriage is attacked through the couples who live in the hell. Martha is unpleasant and aggressive; her vulgarity is her chief weapon to pull down her husband. She cultivates the appearance of fertility inspite of her age. Maria Stenz observes that “Martha is an alienated woman who lived at home and daydreamed about her future instead of creating it herself” (Stenz, *Edward Albee* 41).

Martha and George live in the small New England town of New Carthage. Their wonderful old house suggests a middle class home with tiled bathroom, door-chimes and a portable bar. The play begins with distrust and lack of mutual confidence between husband and wife. George and Martha are unable to have a child together. Martha has nothing to do at home, she spends her time in shopping: “She is a housewife; she buys things” (Albee *Who’s Afraid* 6). Martha is a woman without any aesthetic sense; she lives in her own false delusions and doesn’t struggle to improve the quality of her life. She lives in self-pity and disillusionment. She spends her nights enjoying gin and soda.

The action in the play mainly revolves around the verbal attacks and counter attacks of George and Martha who spare no opportunity in insulting the other, and Martha outshines her husband in this field by calling him a “pig” (16). George and Martha play many games to amuse themselves. The first game is called “Humiliate the Host”. George directs Martha to start blue games to entertain the guests, Nick and Honey. But George himself is the victim of the game. As C.W.E Bigsby writes,

he is a “defeated liberal who has largely opted out of a world whose values he does not share” (Bigsby, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 49). George knows that his life has stagnated but he creates an illusion to hide the truth and he refuses to compromise his integrity. Then follows the sensational game “Humiliate the Host” and George takes the charge to take revenge from Martha. George calls Martha a “book dropper! Child mentioner!” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 140). George is in high spirits as he plans to retaliate with full energy: “We’ve played Humiliate the Host ... we’ve gone through that one ... what shall we do now?” (138); “there are other games. How about ... how about ... Hump the Hostess?” (139). Martha calls him “a portrait of a man drowning”. Martha is under the attack of George. He manipulates another game to let her down. He proposes: “We’ll play a round of Get the Guests. How about that? How about a little game of get the guests?” (140). George knows how to control Martha, Nick and Honey. The tone of Martha is quite cynical and ridiculing: “I don't know what you’re so tired about ... you haven’t done anything all day, you didn’t have any classes or anything” (67). George was the choice of her father who wanted George to become the President of the college but George proved a dullard as Martha pulls him up: “When you’ve made something, you want to pass it on, to somebody. So I was sort of on the lookout for...prospects with the new men. An heir apparent” (88). Martha delights in sadistic pleasure in bullying George.

When the ladies go upstairs, George and Nick confide in one another. George’s failure to achieve distinction in the History department and his failure as a writer are the basis for “Humiliate the Host” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 38). Nick’s opportunistic marriage with Honey for money and her hysterical pregnancy allows George to retaliate in “Get the Guests” (93). Martha’s infidelity and her sexual

advances provide basis for ‘Hump the Hostess’ (15). Martha’s disclosure to Nick that she and George have a son provided the basis for “Bring Up Baby”. Each game in the drama unravels the psychic pressures of the individuals and their inner void. The games create a miniature culture with rules and regulations and a fluid value system. The breach of confidence is very common; each character assails the other to derive sadistic pleasure. Martha is at her best in showing her vulgarity and in desperation, George cries out: “THE GAME IS OVER!” (136). Martha refuses to stop and goes on insulting George who with new energy declares to take revenge from Martha: “This is my game! You played yours... you people. This is my game!” (142). George cuts Nick down to size in front of Honey and Martha. Honey becomes sick and starts vomiting, she rushes to the bathroom:

Martha: “You make me sick.”

George: “It’s perfectly all right for you...I mean, you can make your own rules...you can go around like a hopped-up Arab, slashing away at everything in sight, scaring up half the world if you want to. But somebody else try it...no sir!” (151-52).

George is happy that he has taken revenge from Martha, he is happy that Martha is all cards down. In this situation of exultation he advises her thus:

George: “I’m giving you good advice, now. [...] There’s quicksand here, and you’ll be dragged down, just as... [...] ...before you know it... sucked down...” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 115).

Martha is an angry, frustrated and a strong woman who cannot be easily defeated. She and Nick join together to humiliate George. Martha crosses all barriers

and limits of womanhood. She openly seduces Nick to offend George who cries in a trance: "You ineffectual sons of bitches... You're the worst!" (111). He is so much hurt that he decides to take revenge upon his rivals. The games George and Martha play symbolize their freedom. There are strict rules of the games as these games cannot be played everywhere or anytime. George and Martha play fun and games strictly according to the rules. Each game has an internal order. Again each game has an end in itself. Each game excites tensions and promotes feelings of competition. Interestingly the opening of the play is very unconventional and innovative. The play opens with George and Martha returning home from a party at her father's house. George and Martha play games to humiliate each other. Their dialogues are packed with subtle verbal phrases, the witty and cynical language depict the inner void of the protagonists. The role played by Nick, who in the eyes of voluptuous Martha is "young...and blond and...well-built" (9). Nick is young and attractive; Martha tries to seduce him to excite jealousy in George who is impotent. Martha has won her one match by knocking George down with "a punch in the jaw" (56). Nick is physically agile and Martha is sensual and erotic. In Act I, Martha returns downstairs to join the others. She is now in her "most voluptuous" clothes. George comments thus: "There you are, my pet" (47). Nick is highly impressed by the sexual appeal of Martha and says: "Well, now. ..." (47). Nick is ambitious as he enjoys sexual adultery; Martha has the thirst for revenge. It looks preposterous that George ignores Martha's sexual orgies and Nick's sexual advances for Martha. George's home reflects the limit of hollowness and perversions of the American culture. George knows that Martha is a sick cat suffering from mental disorder as he says: "What it is, actually, is it a pictorial representation of the order of Martha's mind?" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 22).

Albee creates an unconventional community populated by George and Martha who throw away all moral scruples as the fun and games supply them the value system contrary to the practical experience of life. They follow the rules of the games as they cannot love seriously. When the rules are broken all their illusions are lost and they come down to the world of reality, depressed and frustrated. The antagonistic spirit is established at the very beginning of the game world. A vicious cycle of the game world begins in the First Act. The Act "Fun And Games" begins the conflict between George and Martha. They employ highly destructive weapons to pull down each other. The weapons here are finger-nails. George and Martha "tear at one another's vitals" like truck drivers. Martha uses the tools of barbarism to vent out her pent up emotions of morbidity. Richard E. Amacher observes in his book *Edward Albee* (1969) thus:

Martha seems to be suffering from a long standing psychological repression of an unsolved problem that the alcoholic intoxication and the consequent events of the play in the Third Act eventually flush out of deep hiding in the labyrinth of her sub-consciousness (Amacher, *Edward Albee* 83).

Nick and Honey and the audience witness hurling of dirty remarks, swearing, cursing and shouting going on throughout the night. George, Martha, Nick and Honey play the game of deceit in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Nick is a Professor of Biology and Honey is his wife. Nick and Honey are the doubles of George and Martha. Nick and Honey symbolize the past of George and Martha. The young couple represents the dreams and aspirations of George and Martha. Honey's hysterical pregnancy is also symbolical in the drama. Honey's avoiding conception

relates to his killing the only child he was able to produce. In Bigsby's words, they represent "a warning of the next stage of decline" (Bigsby, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 267).

Martha is the main psychopathological case who seeks to get release from her neurotic tensions through verbal violence and cruelty to avenge her husband for giving a "luckless life". The world of George and Martha is nocturnal, hermetic and demonic—a world haunted by death and horrors. The four neurotic protagonists play nothing but games—"war games" and "nerve games". Albee aims his sharpest thrusts of self-delusion, materialism, opportunism and cannibalism built into the institution of marriage. The tone of Martha is derogatory in the very first scene; she uses insulting remarks for her husband, calls George a "cluck" and a "dumbbell", "blank", "flop", "cipher", "pig" and "Zero". Martha is discontented with her house, with her husband who never does anything: "You never do anything; you never mix ... You just sit around and talk" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 7). George and Martha are kind and cruel towards each other. Their deceitful game expresses their love-hate relationship. As the plot develops, their neurotic relationship becomes violent and aggressive. Martha's reckless and indifferent attitude is an expression of her neurotic tensions. George objects to Martha: "I wish you'd tell me about something sometime. ... I wish you'd stop *springing* things on me all the time" (11). However, Martha derives sadistic pleasure when she sees George in rage: "I like your anger. I think that's what I like about you most ... your anger" (14). George is too weak to confront the stark reality of life lacking the guts to grapple with the external forces that agonize him. He has conceived a world of fantasy to nurture such illusions of life which are antidote to mental depression, nausea, despair and metaphysical

loneliness. For example, George has cemented his marriage relationship with the fiction of their illusive son.

Charles Lyons investigates the role of the child in the life of George and Martha as he observes that the fantasy child is the cause of the hopes and fears of George and Martha. The child acts as a weapon in their hands to target each other and play vicious games. George knows that he is impotent and his wife sterile, but the fiction of having fathered a son sustains his life. In the “Hidden Meaning of Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”, John Dollard interprets the creation of the illusionary child as a means of safety and sanity for Martha. Martha requires George’s love and tolerance to make others believe her.

George shares Martha’s delusion of the fictional son. Martha and George are committed to reaffirm the illusive microcosm, the only way left to live in a psychological vacuum. Albee has given the historical background of the families of George and Martha in bits and pieces. Martha tells Nick and Honey in Act I that her mother died when she was a child. Her father was very fond of her and she grew up very close to her father. She met and fell in love with George. Martha married George just to please her father. George also led a troubled childhood. In Act II George tells Nick the harrowing tale of his life, how he accidentally killed his mother, and later his father. As the plot progresses, it becomes clear that George and Martha married each other for many other reasons than attraction and love. George’s comedy of concealment alludes to his love-hate relationship with Martha expressed in a lyricism of witty malice. George and Martha are experts in picking up fights over petty things; their clash of egos precipitates the situation at home before the guests for they have no moral decency to behave like civilized human beings.

The verbal duel of George and Martha reveals the ambiguity between truth and illusion. George has developed hatred for her father-in-law and he enjoys digging at her father: "Your father has tiny red eyes like...like a white mouse. In fact, he's a white mouse" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 57). Truth is a fact which threatens both George and Martha since both are weak and fragile; illusion is a false image which they have created to survive in the harsh world. This false image is the product of their abnormal mental disorder. Martha never misses an opportunity to humiliate George. She uses all the means to dethrone him. Her cynical remark "You make me puke" indicates how intolerable she finds him. Then after some time she demands a big sloppy kiss from him. Martha calls George a "flop" or a "stud" depending on how he can perform in bed. George and Martha go on creating scene after scene and in each attack a scene of seduction is enacted. Martha's opening line "What a dump!" (3) begins the scene of attack and counter attack. The first game of power starts with Martha's mentioning of her teeth which are more than George's. Martha depicts the impotency of George. She calls him thin and weak. He appears as a man whose wife can knock him down.

George defends himself against the allegations of Martha, he claims that he does not have a "paunch" in comparison of Nick: "What I've got . . . I've got this little distension just below the belt . . . but it's hard . . . It's not soft flesh. I use the handball courts" (35). Nick is not interested in fun and games at the initial stage but soon he starts playing the game with determination to attract Martha. Nick soon gets involved in the fun and games of the hosts. He expresses his resolve: "I'll play the charades like you've got 'em set up... I'll play in your language... I'll be what you say I am" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 150). George takes up the challenge and is confident

that he has got Nick. When he tries to lay the “Queen of Spades”, Nick attacks George and forces him to kick him. George admits that “Nick has the most profound indication of a social malignancy... no sense of humour” (68). Nick does not understand many of George’s jokes. In Act II, Nick tells the truth about him to George: “You’ve got History on your side. ... I’ve got Biology on mine. History, Biology” (112). The two subjects and their differences describe the two professors. Nick is rational, practical and believes in facts. George is romantic, imaginary and unrealistic. He takes Science as a menace. George starts condemning Martha in front of Nick using insulting and derogatory words. Nick soon becomes sick of the hosts who fight like dirty animals. He is shocked by the vulgarity of Martha. Martha plays her trump card to provoke George. She wants to give a psychological torture to enjoy the fun. Martha teases George with more energy than she employs in seducing Nick. George feels almost non-existent in the presence of Nick: “Don’t I sort of fade into the background... get lost in the cigarette smoke” (32). Martha uses very derogatory remarks to emasculate George: “He’s not completely sure it’s his own kind” (71). Albee juxtaposes mirth and gloom, laughter and tears to produce dark humour. George and Martha behave like tribal savages as they draw pleasure in hurting others. Their sadistic pleasure creates an atmosphere of disgust:

Martha: “I know chromosomes are sweeties.

I love chromosomes.”

George: “Martha eats them... for breakfast.

She sprinkles them on her rice” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid 2*).

Throughout the drunken evening in the play, George reveals the truth about the marriage of Nick. They become witness to their dysfunction and illusions. The

characters pretend, play games and hide the truth. Nick sarcastically comments that he knows that George and Martha are lying. "*We all play*" shows that everyone is hidden behind falsehood and dependent on lies. Alcohol is used as a symbol to mask true emotions. The games in Albee's play including "*peeling back the label*" are metaphors that reveal the truth hidden behind each of the characters. The audience witness the stage filled with wounds springing from love-hate relationship, glancing blows, destructions of confidence, revulsions, intimidations, bitter exaltations and hopeless embraces. George and Martha tear at each other with their biting sharp words. The sadistic purpose is to give pain and draw blood. George and Martha behave like wounded animals, always ready to attack each other to draw blood. Indeed, George and Martha are the dysfunctional couple. Albee exposes and ridicules the mystery of the relationship between George and Martha layer by layer in each dialogue. The comic and grotesque is mixed to heighten the absurdity of human relationships. George's accusations relate Martha to animals: "She is braying, chewing ice cubes like a cocker spaniel, and howling like a sub-human monster." George tells Martha: "It's just I've got to figure out some new way to fight you, Martha. Guerilla tactics, maybe ... internal subversion ... I don't know. Something" (125).

The emotional instability of Martha is an index to the personal emptiness of her life. Martha feels uprooted and helpless; she seeks refuge in her violent outbursts to escape from the neurotic fits. Her prejudices against George and her guests are a mask to ensure that she is still in control of her life. Martha finds no meaning in her life; she spends nights drowned in gin and days in sleeping off the drunkenness. In despair Martha is seen packing away the booze: "My God, you can swill it down,

can't you" (16). She drinks and drinks and becomes intoxicated. Her sexual instincts become active when she is drunk. George ridicules her sexual expression thus: "your skirt up over your head" (17). While dancing with Nick, Martha starts flirting with him. She talks about the novel of George. She knows how to arouse George's anger and how to torment George. George warns Martha that "THE GAME IS OVER" (136), but Martha doesn't listen to George and his threats and continues: "Imagine such a thing! A book about a boy who murders his mother and kills his father, and pretends it's all an accident!" (136). She uses abusive and filthy verbal attacks on George who has withdrawn into his own world of fantasy. George is made to feel the burden of his hollowness of existence:

"I'm numbed enough... now, to be able to take you when we're alone. I didn't listen to you... Or when I do listen to you, I sift everything. I bring everything down to reflex response, so I don't really hear you, which is the only way to manage it" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 155).

While the guests, Honey and Nick, are silent spectators, George and Martha create a night of carnage and chaos indulging in convulsive giggles, guffaws and smirks. Now George is worried about his game with Martha. Albee gives the metaphor of chess to describe the attacks and counter attacks of the players. They freely use fraud and duplicity to outwit others. Like a chess game, the game is of deceits, frauds, and hoaxes. Nick and Honey function as contrasts to George and Martha. Nick is dominant, controls every situation and his wife, Honey, obeys him. He is young, bright and successful and his sexual attractiveness excites sexual passions in Martha. Honey is unfit to comprehend reality; she is quite passive in the

drama. She is horrified at the words “violence, violence!” (135). Martha is full of malice and seduction, with a quick mind and sharp tongue. George knows the sexual intentions of Martha who is taking physical liberties with Nick. He does not dissuade Nick.

Unlike Martha, Honey is a weaker partner, she is slim hipped and infertile given to hysterical pregnancies. Honey is not a tall woman; she is not pretty as well. Martha calls her as “a mousey little type, without any hips, or anything” (20). In Act II, George refers to her as “monkey-nipples” and “angel-tits”. George is a psychologist; he can read what is going in the mind of Martha. While Honey and Martha are upstairs, George tells Nick: “One of the things I do not know about them is what they talk about while the men are talking. (Vaguely) I must find out some time” (42). Honey is quite a boring and a passive character; she giggles things like “Oh, isn’t this lovely!” (20) and “Well I had fun...it was a wonderful party” (21). She is un-offensive, always stupid and devoted to her husband. The games these married people play expose them bone and marrow. Nick married Honey because her father was rich. Now marriage provides Nick and Martha the opportunities for adultery. George flays Martha thus: “musical beds is the faculty sport around here” (34). The seriousness of marital relationship is lost in the whirlpool of fun and games they play. George sarcastically remarks that “the way to a man’s heart is through his wife’s belly” (34). George uses an opportunity to caricature his wife in the most deriding language calling her an incestuous mother who would sleep with her imagined son:

“He couldn’t stand you fiddling at him all the time, breaking into the bedroom with your kimono flying, fiddling at him all the time, with your liquor breath on him, and your hands all over his... our son ran all the time because Martha here used to corner him” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 120).

George takes a short-barreled shotgun and aims it at the back of Martha’s head and pulls the trigger. “You are dead! Pow! You’re dead!” George says (57). The red and yellow Chinese parasol released from the barrel of the gun symbolizes Martha’s defeat. Now George takes Nick to task and plays a subtle game to entrap him. Nick is not very clever and he is easily entrapped. He again trusts Martha and this time also he is deceived. While Nick is struggling in their trap, appreciation does not last much, the destructive war of words begins again between George and Martha. The love-hate relationship between George and Martha continues. Martha calls him a bastard and hurts his ego. She alleges that he makes her sick. George tries to console Martha thus: “I thought you’d like it, sweetheart ... it’s sort of to your taste ... blood, carnage and all. Why, I thought you’d get all excited” (152).

Laing observes in his book *Self and Others* that “people engulfed in schizophrenic interactions are constantly puzzling over what is meant by any statement, for any statement can function in innumerable ways” (Laing 158). George and Martha are tied in a mysterious trap of games of lies and frauds. They are engulfed in the vicious cycle of attacks and counter-attacks. They desperately desire to end all games but they seem to be helpless. Albee exposes and ridicules the sacred institution of marriage and the concept of fidelity in a witty lyrical style. For Martha and George, Nick and Honey fidelity is a meaningless value; they derive pleasures

only from fun and games. The turning point in Act I occurs when Honey tells George that Martha discussed with her about her son who will be twenty one the next day. George feels threatened by reality as he restlessly asks Honey twice whether Martha told her about their son. After two decades of marital life full of disappointment, George and Martha's relationship seems destructive. They weld their relationship and create their own myth - an imagined son. This illusory son serves as a comfort until Martha breaks the rule of the game by mentioning it to Nick and Honey. Needless to say there exists a solid bond between George and Martha in their endless verbal dueling.

Martha slowly tortures George by heaping indignities on him. She tells the guests that George is an unsuccessful writer, and an impotent husband. George cannot tolerate his humiliation and says to Martha: "I'm six years younger than you are" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 15). George implies that Martha is old and useless because she is no longer pretty. Martha pays him back in the same tone and says: "Well you're going bald" (15). George feels threatened and says: "I said I was impressed, Martha. I'm beside myself with jealousy" (49). George and Martha cry and make their tears frozen. However, the cycle continues. Nick discovers that Honey "is lying down on the floor again, the tiles, all cured up, and she starts peeling the label off the liquor bottle, the brandy bottle" (187). Nick calls Martha and George crazy. He asserts that "It's the refuge we take when the unreality of the world weighs too heavy on our tiny heads. Relax; sink into it; you're no better than anybody else" (188). Martha makes sexual advances to Nick in front of Honey and George. The tone becomes aggressive and serious when the reference is to their "son" about whom they have promised to keep secret. The mystery about the "child"

of George and Martha is the main pillar of the plot. The “child” expresses a desire for fecundity within their relationship. Their fictitious “child” is a symbol of their survival; it is the fertility symbol expressing their hopes and aspirations. Both are leading a life in this absurd world on the strength of this “fictitious child”. The child symbolizes maturity and adulthood. The false illusion of the child sustains their life. But illusion cannot remain for long as it gets destroyed sooner or later. The child symbolizes all their hopes and aspirations, needs and problems of existence. The symbol of the child also connects George and Martha to Honey and Nick. Nick and Honey are also childless. Honey is afraid of childbearing. George pleads Martha to keep the secret of their child, it is an understanding of their private life and no outsider should know it. Martha grows violent and aggressive and thinks she knows how to outwit George in fun and games. Martha emerges a great manipulator of the game and makes George angry. She wins the power game. They dominate the show playing their fun and games of deceit before Nick and Honey. There are two major games running throughout the drama. Martha and George are playing a very destructive game. The other is between Nick and Martha. Martha starts sexual games with Nick just to excite jealousy in the mind of George. Martha is very uncertain in her attitude as she changes her colours like a chameleon. George is worried about Martha as he reads her mind. He is sure that in her sexual mania she will divulge the secret of their “fictitious son” to Honey. George becomes violent and in a fit of frenzy he attempts to strangle Martha. He pushes her against a car and threatens to shoot her with a gun. George calls Martha a monster who refutes his accusation thus:

Martha: “I’m loud and I’m vulgar, and I wear the pants in the house because somebody’s got to, but I am not a monster. I’m not.”

George: “You’re spoiled, self-indulgent, wilful, dirty-minded, liquor-ridden” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 33).

Indeed, the funny games of Martha and George played before Nick and Honey are clinical in nature. The games are played not to pass time but to get release from the neurotic tensions and obsessions. George and Martha are virtually leading a hellish life since Martha is a barren lady and George is physically impotent. The problem with Martha is that she is scared of reality and George tolerates her: “I don’t mind your dirty under-things in public...well, I do mind, but I have reconciled myself to that...but you have moved, bag and baggage, into your own fantasy world” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 109). Ironically Martha reels under pressures of false dreams and illusions. All the protagonists are bound to suffer ennui and boredom in life. Their options in life are limited, either they can end their life by committing suicide like Jerry or they can get lost in the world of fantasy and illusions. Pinter also dramatized the same situation in his play *Caretaker*. In this play the protagonists Aston and Mick play fun games with Dick who is an uninvited guest. Nick and Honey in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are unable to understand the malicious intentions of George. The guests are unaware of George’s collusion with Martha. They go on participating in the games enjoying the drinks.

The last scene is totally different from its preceding scenes. The violent atmosphere, the sharp language, tears and outbursts give a primitive feel to the audience. The marriage of George and Martha seems dysfunctional because Martha is childless. They try to deal in their own way with the absurd situation of their life.

The absence of a child creates a void in their life. Martha becomes loud while George becomes pessimistic. Martha's "fictitious son" is a symbol as well as a "weapon they use in every one of their arguments". Fiction also becomes true to Martha as she cries over the death of her imaginary son. The imaginary son had been a source of hope and happiness for twenty one years. George cannot kill his "kid" since he is the only hope left in the world. Martha forgets that she has broken the rules of the game mentioning her "son" to Nick and Honey.

The theme of death is predominant in the plays of Edward Albee. He came under the influence of Nietzsche, Ionesco, Camus, Genet and Beckett and evolved the nihilistic approach to life. The existentialists supported Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead". No wonder, death is the main theme in the drama. Nelvin Vos in his article "The Process of Dying in the Plays of Edward Albee" observes that with death man faces the mystery of Being and Nothingness. Death brings man to the threshold of authentic existence. The climax of the drama begins with the Act "The Exorcism" when George and Martha play the last game of "bringing up baby". Martha and George are at their best enjoying sadistic pleasure in venomous, cannibalistic attacks as they feed on each other's weaknesses. Albee follows Artaud in depicting the savage behaviour of his protagonists. Artaud openly declared thus: "But whoever said Theatre was made to define character, to resolve conflicts of a human, emotional order of the present day psychological nature" (Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* 28). Indeed, betraying a taste for crime, sexuality, savageness and perversion, George and Martha are conceived as the protagonists of *The Theatre of Cruelty*. The tragedy with this neurotic couple is that they indulge in private savage games rather than face their shared loneliness. In the last scene of the

drama, Martha is intoxicated and exhausted. George wishes to win his deceitful game. She wishes to make Martha mad. The last game is a true test of George and Martha like a boxing match. George explains the whole situation to a baffled Honey, “When you get down to bone, you haven’t got all the way, yet. There’s something inside the bone ... the marrow ... and that’s what you gotta get at” (155). The marrow allusion is significant, for it provides a key moment in the action of the drama. George finally realizes his compulsion to save Martha’s very existence. The son-myth must be broken to exist in the real world. The marrow allusion signifies George’s compulsion to strip away the illusion governing their lives. The last Act is full of tension; Albee uses all his power to expose his characters. Martha is on the verge of total disintegration. She is seen talking to herself in a fit of neurosis. She confesses her defeat to herself. She acknowledges: “Martha, I’ve misjudged you. And I’ve misjudged you, too, George” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 185).

The trouble with an illusion is that it works for a time. George knows that he cannot afford to live in the illusive microcosm. No wonder, the Third Act is really ritualistic: George wants to destroy all demons of illusions. The ritual of “exorcism” is very effective. George decides to kill their “son” to take revenge from Martha. He is forced to take this harsh decision of life for a better future because it is not possible to spend the whole life in illusions. He is in rage and looks desperate. He does it to wound Martha deeply. He declares that the boy is killed in a car accident on a country road while trying to avoid a porcupine. Martha pleads with George not to go through with his plan, but George doesn’t listen to her.

“No! No! You cannot do that! You can’t decide that for yourself! I will not let you do that! I will not let you decide these things” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 232).

Martha tries her best to plead and dissuade George not to go with the cruel plan. Martha is horrified and cries in despair: “You can’t kill him! You can’t have him die!” (233). Martha asks George to show her the death telegram. George in a grotesque manner tells her that he ate the telegram. George interrogates Martha:

“When man can’t abide by the present, as it is, there are just two options open: people can either turn to a contemplation of the past, as I have done, or they set about to... alter the future. And when you want to change something ... you BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!” (Albee, *Who’s Afraid* 178).

Until now, George has brooded over the past, but from now on, he will “alter the future”. This commitment of George reflects his desperate attempt to reconcile with the existential agony of life. In spite of the protests of Martha, George breaks the illusive microcosm exorcising the child:

George: “Martha ... Our son is dead ... He was ... killed ... late in the afternoon ... on a country road, with his learner’s permit in his pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a ...”

Martha: “YOU...CAN’T ... DO...THAT!”

George: “... large tree” (231).

The two chief excuses for the sufferings of George and Martha, the two weapons they have used against each other are eliminated in one dramatic stroke. Ruby Cohn observes that George's decision is not merely "theatrically punitive" nor is it a response to "demonic spite", as Anne Paolucci suggests. It is an emotional outburst of Martha who is too weak to endure the existential reality. Schechner comments thus: "There is no real, hard bedrock of suffering in *Virginia Woolf*, it is all illusory, depending upon a "child" who never was born: a gimmick, a trick, a trap" (Schechner, *Who's Afraid of Edward Albee?* 77). George weeps, his bitter tears reveal that he is conscious of his loss. In fact, in punishing Martha, he is punishing himself. Martha still sees the child as a saviour, a medium of reconciliation and redemption in a hostile world. Martha called him "Sonny Jim," out of love and affection as a mother. Her imagined son had created an emotional bridge between the husband and wife. George and Martha enjoyed the bliss of married life through imagined reminiscences of the child's life. George and Martha are seen talking quietly together in anguish after George has killed the baby. George sees the baby not as Dionysus or Christ reborn to inaugurate a new age or to save people, but as a demon to be exorcised, the product of Walpurgisnacht Orgy. Martha knows that life will be very horrible for her. Theirs is the tragedy of wasted life. George and Martha are bound to live in a void with no hope of future. They have to live in reality. All illusions have been stripped off. But the power of the love they share lies in its transforming quality. Love is a fraud for them. Life becomes unbearable for George. Despite her near-infidelity, Martha truly loves George. She cries and confesses: He is "the only man in my life who has ever made me happy" (Albee, *Who's Afraid* 189). Martha and George killed their fantasy child to live in a world of reality.

The ending of the play on this note is very much like the ending of *Waiting for Godot*. The hopes of Vladimir and Estragon are shattered because Godot doesn't arrive. The hopes of George and Martha of having an imaginary child are also shattered. Both George and Martha feel the unendurable pain but they cannot live in illusion for long. Albee uses a new medium of communication to articulate the psychological shock of George and Martha. In the last scene, their conversation is largely governed by silences, pauses, repetition and other non-verbal, non-sense gestures. George and Martha are alone on the stage ready to bear all the burden of reality.

To conclude, George and Martha emerge as helpless neurotics, victims of their hysterical cravings. There is absolutely no tragic grandeur in George's act of exorcism; it is an emotional outburst of the neurological tensions that gripped the soul of George. Martha has no choice but to accept the bitter reality. Agamemnon, Orestes, Electra also have illusions which urge them to seek confrontation with the gods and thus create a niche in the hall of heroic fame. Their illusions lead them to tragic sublimation or redemption. But George's predicament is that his desperate struggle to keep the illusive microcosm intact leads him to spiritual sterility, chaos and mental paralysis. Adler observes thus:

“George's shattering of the illusion of his and Martha's son is his answer to Martha's desire for him to ... assert his strength against her ...many masculine qualities...[which] feeds off of George's emasculation” (Adler, *Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 69).

While the tragic illusions inspired Oedipus and Agamemnon with nobility and the spirit of invincibility, George's neurotic illusions result into his corrosion of self. He becomes arrogant, haughty, bestial and pervert. Martha too behaves like a monster. Othello emerges as a strong man with tragic limitations, but George is a "flop", a "zero" with illusions of potency. Thomas B. Adler further observes in his essay; *Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: A Long Night's Journey Into Day* thus:

...George exorcises the child not only to kill the illusion and live in reality, but to destroy one reality that in which he has failed to exercise the strength necessary to make the marriage creative even without children and create a new reality to take its place. George, through mapping out for Nick and Honey the way to redirect their lives, achieves for Martha and himself a radical redirection of their own" (Adler 67).

Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?* reveals that motherhood is the main focus of the dramatist with Martha as the central heroine. Each woman in this universe longs to become a mother sooner or later because motherhood leads to the fulfillment of her life. The society gives proper respect and recognition to a woman. Unfortunately in the universe of Albee, both Martha and Honey fail to give birth to children. They are sterile women and this is the main cause of their neurotic sufferings. Martha is barren and Honey takes pills to eliminate any pregnancies. Women are supposed to be good mothers and wives in society. Reproduction is considered healthy and progressive. Simon de Beauvoir published her famous book *The Second Sex* (1949) depicting the oppression of women at home and work places.

Martha admits in the last scene that George is the only man in the world whom she loves. She confesses that George is the real person who has made her happy. Ironically, she refuses to remain silent even when everything is lost. In the entire drama, Martha is loud, vulgar and assertive. Her sexual and erotic poses created sensation on the Broadway. She is an antithesis to femininity. Hence, she is punished by George mercilessly by stripping away all her false illusions. The play may be regarded as a feminist text since it raises all the vital issues of women, motherhood, rights of women and status of a mother. Martha is taught a bitter lesson that being a mother she should live without a web of lies and treacherous games and face reality honestly. Albee gives us the theme of turbulent marriages in this play like a true feminist. The play is a wonderful depiction of the agony suffered by the characters when they undergo gradual corrosion of self.

Chapter 7

**Pirandellian Theatre of Sanity and Insanity: Corrosion of
Self in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern Are Dead***

The dramatists after the Second World War made many experiments in techniques revolting against the plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Beckett, Albee and Tom Stoppard followed Ionesco and Genet to depict the absurdity of human life. The Theatre of the Absurd has been characterized by unique tendencies. In the first place, there is formlessness in the plot structure. The characters are tramps and sick anti-heroes. Ionesco's model makes the dialogue absurd. Brecht's model anti-theatrical devices were imitated by the playwrights to articulate the complex sensibility of the age. Peter Weiss' model was the theatre-within-the theatre as a means to achieve alienation. Pirandello's meta-theatre opens up avenues to political theatre and to the Theatre of the Absurd. Contemporary theatre abounds in kinetic, visual, vocal and bodily manifestations. Pirandellian theatre is intellect oriented. The themes of reality and illusion, the mutability and multiplicity of human personality, the conflict between life and art and the essential conundrum of producing a work of art persist in his plays. Pirandello blended the artifice of the theatre with the reality of life. His plays brought singular ideas into the realm of modern drama. With his brilliance, intellect and powerful imagination he transformed his characters into the stillness of his art. If we analyze, the plot of the drama *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), we find the fractured nature of reality. The dramatist has depicted the absurd situation giving a conflict between truth and reality. Pirandello is a modernist; his drama foreshadows the

unconventional dramatic devices used by Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht and Edward Albee. Robert Brustein says:

Pirandello's influence on the drama of the twentieth century is immeasurable. In his agony over the nature of existence, he anticipates Sartre and Camus; in his insights into the disintegration of personality and the isolation of man (Brustein, *Krapp and A Little Claptrap* 316).

Pirandello was a great experimenter of drama; he made many innovations in dramatic art. His famous play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) is remarkable for experimentation. Antonio Illiano highly praised the experimental tone of the drama. Pirandello, in his *Preface* to the play, defines this drama "as a mixture of tragic and comic, fantastic and realistic, in a humouristic situation quite new and infinitely complex" (Pirandello, *Six Characters* 1). Pirandello's main concern is with the art form of drama. Brustein contends that Pirandellian drama is a drama of frustration and Stoppard depicted the frustration of modern man. Pirandello was greatly influenced by the ideas of Bergson. He holds that "life (or reality or time) is fluid, immobile, evanescent, and indeterminate" (Bergson, *Matter and Memory* 286). The individuality of a man is formed by his ideas; the role and freedom that he enjoys in society. Therefore, "the play is a dizzying hall of mirrors that tests the philosophical basis of the concept of reality, while exposing and renewing the operating principles of the drama" (Brustein, *Krapp and A Little Claptrap* 256). In the seventeenth century, the term "ontology" was invented. It refers to the study of "what is". Borchert defined the term thus "Ontology is the most general general science or study of Being, Existence, or Reality" (Borchert,

Choices and Conflicts 21) which addresses abstract ideas. According to Illiano, “Pirandello raises the question: Who and what are the characters? He deals with the question: Who and what am I?...” (Illiano, *Pirandello and Theosophy* 6). Pirandellian character is a live power and his theatre is opposed to the theatre of representation.

Pirandello grew up in Sicily that witnessed both extreme poverty and wealth, Pirandello was well aware of the striking contrasts of daily Sicilian life. These contrasts would influence Pirandello’s work as well as his life. In his famous 1908 essay, *On Humour*, Pirandello presents a sense of disproportion between ideals and reality. Pirandello distinguishes the humorous from the comic explaining that while the comic seeks only to make one laugh, the humorous seeks to show the contradiction of opposing ideas. He argues that “the feeling of the opposite” is given through humorous episodes in the drama that is produced by the activity of reflection. He has focused on the dualism of life which explores the psychology of the characters. Eric Bentley, the famous drama critic, observes thus:

People say that my drama is obscure and they call it cerebral drama. The new drama possesses a distinct character from the old: whereas the latter had as its basis passion, the former is the expression of the intellect. One of the novelties that I have given to modern drama consists in converting the intellect into passion (Bentley, *In Search of Theatre* 3).

Pirandellian character is passionate about his logic and intellect. This leads him to embrace a delusional reality. As with any multi-faceted character, the

Pirandellian character is more than just passion and intellect. The Pirandellian hero is often a self-analyzing and self-aware character who suffers from loss. As Umberto Mariani writes in his book *Living Masks: The Achievement of Pirandello*, Pirandello's characters know that their loss is final yet they resent it. They refuse to resign themselves to the chaos of formlessness and of insignificance. By exploring reality, he remains buried in delusion; his lack of understanding motivates the Pirandellian character into action. He struggles to create a personal reality in an attempt to establish a place in society where he can be accepted. Unfortunately this delusion of mutual understanding is what drives the Pirandellian character to the brink of madness. Pirandello has always been preoccupied with the problem of personality. He illustrated that there are as many logics and reasons as there are individuals. The individuals appear to him in double, triple, in multiple forms because there is no fixed personality.

In the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*; the theme of relativity of truth is developed out of contrast between reality and illusion. This contrast between illusion and reality juxtaposing two forms of drama and two sets of people is a manifestation of the technique. Characters frozen in single emotion assert their reality over the actors' reality which is subject to change. Just as a person's nature is in a state of continuous flux, so is the actors' reality. The self changes with time, develops, imbibes new experiences, but never remains stable. Thus art is more real than life because it is not subject to changes that constitute life; it is fixed and therefore immortal. The flux and movement of life is trapped into moments, transformed into drama and are presented on stage. Pirandello realized that it was difficult to present the ever changing reality through realistic drama. He made various innovations to accommodate truth and multiple personality of an individual.

The drama opens with a rehearsal of one of Pirandello's own drama titled *Mixing it up*. A disgruntled troupe of actors is trying to rehearse for the play. The setting is a theatre where the actors, producer, prompter, light man have assembled to practise their parts. Suddenly the rehearsal is interrupted, with the arrival of six people on the stage. They call themselves 'characters' and claim to carry a drama within themselves. They create confusion. Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* depict characters in a very unconventional style. Six characters are introduced as the Father, the Mother, the Stepdaughter, the Son, the Young Boy, and the Little Girl. They are in desperate search for an author. They insist that they be allowed to perform their drama. They were searching for an author who would complete them, and demand to relive the act in which they were frozen. The drama that begins is 'a play within a play' wherein the playwright exhibits his themes of appearance and reality, life and art, and the problems of artistic creation. The characters carry an innate vivacity. Pirandello uses the device of 'Play within a play' to create confusion and to impose a pattern on the formless matter. Kenneth Pickering observes that:

It is now seen as an aspect of meta-theatre: theatre that concerns itself with the nature of theatre, and it is interesting to explore just how frequently the theatre has both examined and celebrated its own nature in various ways (Pickering, *Studying Modern Drama* 40).

The structure of the play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, is quite experimental. The plot begins with chaos and ends with chaos. The suicide of Boy is baffling and only the Father knows his reality, the point at which he is frozen by the author. Pickering aptly remarks thus:

The playwright endeavours to make the audience observe and analyze its own role. Heightened reality is achieved when the audience watches actors in the process of creating a play. This double theatricality draws attention to the meta-theatrical nature of the activity and investigates the states in which it is no longer possible to discern life from art. When we see a play within a play, it is as if we were putting the concept of theatre itself under microscope (Pickering, *Studying Modern Drama* 42).

The hostile clashes between characters and actors on the one hand and among the improvisers themselves on the other, enables the playwright to employ inversion as a theatre technique and place art against life, illusion as opposed to reality, rationality in contrast to irrationality and cold logic against frenzied outbursts. Tom Stoppard has a very interesting family history. Dr. Thomas Straussler was born in Czechoslovakia on 3rd July 1939. He was a victim of Nazi racialism; his father was transferred to Singapore in 1939. He took his family with him. When the Japanese invaded that city in 1942, he sent his wife and children to India. Dr. Straussler was killed in the war. Young Thomas attended an American boarding school in Darjeeling. It was a chance that his mother fell in love with Kenneth Stoppard who was a British Army Major. She got married and both of her sons took his name. They migrated to England where his step father worked in a factory. Hunter, his biographer, reports that Tom finished his education in 1954 and joined the *Western Daily Press* in Bristol. He wanted to become a great writer and a roving reporter in international trouble spots. He had no background in philosophy, philology and metaphysics. Interestingly, his plays are filled with references to

circus and other fields. In 1958 he moved to *Bristol Evening World*, specializing in theatre and films. Stoppard never attended a university like Shakespeare and began his career as a journalist. Stoppard wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1968), *Enter a Free Man* (1968), *After Margritte* (1970), *Jumpers* (1972), *Travesties* (1974), *Dirty Linen and New-found-land* (1976), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1979), *Dogg's Hamlet* (1979), *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1980) and *Arcadia* (1993).

Tom Stoppard presented his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear* in 1964. Ronald Bryden in his review published in *The Observer* remarked that it was the most brilliant debut by a young playwright since John Arden. Brustein observed that Tom Stoppard offers “a form of Beckett without tears” (Brustein, *Seasons of Discontent* 93). Stoppard struggled for seven years in his writing career. The success became elusive for him. But the staging of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Meet King Lear* in Germany made him famous in the world. He was twenty-nine and he had become the youngest playwright ever to be staged at the National Theatre. Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is a theatrical parasite as the plot of the play is based on *Hamlet* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Shakespeare gave Stoppard the main characters and Pirandello supplied him the various techniques. Eliot's *The Love of Alfred J. Prufrock* impressed Stoppard. He borrowed the symbolical imagery from Eliot. Stoppard explored the questions concerning life and art, fate and free will and death. Katherine Kelly and Michael Hinden remarked that “*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is the first major stage play that feeds on Shakespeare, Beckett and Pirandello” (Kelly, *Tom Stoppard Journalist* 2). In his play, Stoppard recycles Shakespeare's drama changing the

perspective from which the events are perceived. His play is an inversion of *Hamlet*. The play focusses on two minor characters and the reality and the absurdity of human nature is explored through them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern discuss important issues on their mind as they are sitting around in the Danish castle trying to figure out why they are there. They know they were summoned there to help Hamlet earlier that morning, but don't have a clue to what is wrong with him or how to help. They interact with the players who come to perform the "mouse trap" play. Hamlet sets up to catch the king. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are otherwise left alone in the castle, waiting for an interaction with them. They play with words and become confused making for many comedic scenes, fun to read aloud and see the interaction. The reality and absurdity of life is filtered through their ambiguous dialogues. The play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* has three Acts. Each Act can be identified by its settings. Act One is set outside the castle walls, introducing the characters and their situations. Act Two is set within the castle as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are introduced to more characters and they engage in deeper philosophical conversations. Act Three is set on a ship going to England.

The theme of death is predominant in the plot. Many times throughout the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern talk about life. They explain how they cannot and do not know how to act without another person telling them what to do or how to do it. The title of the drama refers to the theme of death. Guildenstern argues, quite heatedly at times, what he believes death to be against what the players believe. Guildenstern believes death to be the absence of being and if one does not return, he is dead. The players, however, believe death to be something that can be

acted out over and over again. Their arguments bring up the questions of what can be considered living or dying.

The play begins with the identity crisis. Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* begins with the opening lines "Who's there?" throwing the question of identity. Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* also begins with the question: Who is on stage? The opening scene begins introducing two men on stage flipping a coin. Stoppard invites the audience to ask the question, "Who's there?" By invoking this question of identity in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* Stoppard builds up the suspense. This uncertainty of identity mimics Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's own blurred understandings of their identities. Stoppard raises the question of their identity which is fluid. There is a lot of confusion and ambiguity in the plot of the play as the King and Queen refer to Rosencrantz as Guildenstern. Both the names are used in different perspectives confusing the readers. The confusion continues in the plot. They cannot distinguish the two from each other. They also introduce themselves incorrectly. When Guildenstern asks Rosencrantz, during the question and answer game, "Who do you think you are?" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 44), they confirm that they do not know who they are. Stoppard uses the images and allusions used by Shakespeare to intensify the atmosphere of uncertainty and ambiguity. According to Ricoeur, the question "who is there" raises the problem of identity in the drama. Shakespeare builds a story around this question "Who's there?" The second line of *Hamlet* is "Stand and unfold yourself". It takes the entire play to discover Shakespeare's characters. The confusion of identity is seen as a common thread in the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are lost in a muddle as they don't know who they are. The King and Queen often address Rosencrantz as Guildenstern

and vice versa. The two main characters become confused and bow when addressed incorrectly and at times can't remember their own names. They also have difficulty understanding their purpose in the castle and why they were called to help Hamlet. Not knowing who they are, they frequently ask each other as well as other characters what they are to do and how they are to know what to do if they are not being told. Therefore, the identity that *Hamlet* creates for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may differ from the identity confusion created by Stoppard. The plot centers on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Stoppard inserts scenes from Hamlet in the plot of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Indeed, Stoppard gives Guildenstern and Rosencrantz monologues which describe the metaphysical despair of the modern man. Guildenstern says, "We cross our bridges when we come to them and burn them behind us" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 47).

The setting of the plot is unconventional as it refers to absurdity at the very outset of the drama. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, there are three main areas in which the play takes place: outside the castle grounds in Denmark, inside the castle walls and on a ship set on a course for England. The scenes outside the castle are nondescript; only described as "a place without any visible character" (11). The change of setting from outdoor to indoor is indicated only by a slight lighting change. The last act is set on the boat to England which is indicated only by soft sea sounds. Since the play lacks description of these settings, students can draw on the prior knowledge they have from reading *Hamlet* to visualize what each looks like. The contrasting characters of Guildenstern and the main Player are a good example of how the use of foil characters can be effective when wanting to emphasize certain characteristics. The Player highly contrasts Guildenstern's

character in his views of death as well as how one must live. The Player is constantly acting whereas Guildenstern only acts when told what to do by other people. These two characters have multiple discussions and arguments about their contrasting views of death. Through most of the play, they sit around the castle waiting for other characters to arrive and give them instructions (like stage directions) instead of taking the initiative and acting for themselves. They depend solely on the words and actions of others to motivate them to act. The title of the play indicates that they “are dead” and they discuss what it is to be dead many times.

Tom Stoppard is a modern playwright who is concerned with absurdum. He used meta-theatricality and language as tools to explore the nature of reality. Tom Stoppard is a playwright with diverse interests, but he is primarily and consistently concerned with human understandings of reality: What is reality? How do different people interpret and understand reality? Are there multiple realities and if so, can they happily coexist? These are the unanswered questions which are the focus of the dramatist; the play mostly focuses on questions of reality, agency, and perception. The main action of the drama focuses on a few main characters, but a large amount of its action is driven by the minor characters who enter and exit again and again. The more minor characters appear and disappear, making demands; they bring more chaos and confusion for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In the drama the main protagonists struggle to discover their place in the world of *Hamlet*. This world is governed by laws of destiny and cause and effect. Their own world is of chaos. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are called to Elsinore where they get involved in political intrigue that they fail to understand.

King Claudius summoned Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Hamlet to probe Hamlet's insane behaviour at court. They are given a task to kill Hamlet who has become a threat to the King. Hamlet swings into action and engineers the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet returns to Denmark safely. Stoppard made many innovations in his drama and made Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the major characters. The plot of the drama is a symbolical story of two common people trapped in an uncontrollable situation. Stoppard's play is loaded with the elements of "The Theatre of Absurd". Stoppard was greatly influenced by the experiments of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Luigi Pirandello.

Stoppard emphasizes the fact that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could change their fate if they had remained passive in carrying out the instructions of Claudius. Guildenstern realizes "there must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said - no. But somehow we missed it" (Stoppard, Rosencrantz 95). He does not remember the moment on the boat when they could have done something, could have changed the course of events but decided not to change anything. Many critics have discussed the relationship between Stoppard's play and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They have pointed out thematic and structural similarities and differences. Brustein argued that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a play within the play of *Hamlet*. Some critics are also of the opinion that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is a combination of two texts-*Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*. Ruby Cohn observes that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* recasts *Waiting for Godot* in Shakespearean terms.

The prominent drama critics have tried to classify Stoppard as a playwright. Taylor and Wiszniowska discuss his output in their books devoted to the Second

Wave of Absurd Theatre. Wiszniowska notices Stoppard's affinities with the Theatre of the Absurd, especially with N. F. Simpson and Harold Pinter. Most of Stoppard's pieces are plays of ideas. It is relevant to stress here that his uniqueness results from his ability to present serious ideas by means of the comic genre. Many critics have noticed this aspect of Stoppard's writing and have highlighted that one of Stoppard's main contributions to modern drama is his ability to shape intellectual debate into a dazzling three-ring circus. Stoppard's plays are called "argument plays". The play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, opens with the game of coin tossing. This device is very effective in drama. The metaphor is very significant in establishing a relationship between reality and illusion, unpredictability and determinism. The last of these dichotomies, as Stoppard argues "represents two sides of his own personality, which can be described as seriousness comprised by his frivolity, or ... frivolity redeemed by his seriousness" (Gussow, *Conversations* 14). Duality is a characteristic trait of Stoppard's plays in which the barrier between the serious and fun theatre is demolished.

The play of Tom Stoppard is of post-modernism aesthetics. Ihab Hassan has opined that the plays of Tom Stoppard belong to the post modern era as his plays are loaded with allusions and inter-textual references. The features of postmodernism are irony, indeterminacy, constructionism, immanence, fragmentation, decanonisation, hybridization and carnivalisation. All these elements are found in abundance in the plays of Stoppard. Stoppard has repeatedly stressed that "theatre is an event and not a text, his plays being "written to happen, not to be read" (Gussow, *Conversations* 37). He participates in rehearsals and often, because of practical considerations, alters the script. In his major plays Stoppard emerges as an

intellectual and entertaining parodist. Parody is the chief dramatic device used by Stoppard. Stoppard has achieved excellence in using the device of inter-textuality, it brings forth the inter relation between texts like *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot*. Michael W. Caddon talks about Stoppard and his use of inter-textuality thus:

Stoppard's comic juxtaposition of styles of theatre, writing, thinking, speaking and living has made him one of the most beloved and most challenging of contemporary playwrights. This course will explore one aspect of his plays: the ways in which he draws attention to the work of other writers and artists in his own work well before the advent of mashup culture. Stoppard married *Hamlet*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author* to give birth to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. This ongoing dramaturgical methodology raises important questions about originality, canonicity, identity, and accessibility (Caddon, *Beyond Absurdity* 125).

Tom Stoppard became famous as a writer of "serious comedy" and his plays are plays of ideas that deal with philosophical issues. Lionel Abel used the term meta-theatre in his book entitled *Meta-theatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*. He defines meta-theatre as resting on two basic postulates: "the world is a stage and life is a dream" (Lionel Abel, *Meta-theatre* 105). He perceives meta-theatre as a modern equivalent of tragedy and the plays which are thus labeled "are theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized" (Abel 60). In his book *Meta-theatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, Abel discusses a number of plays which are meta-dramatic or meta-theatrical. He argues that a meta-play is the necessary form for dramatizing characters who, "having full self-consciousness, cannot but participate in their own

dramatization” (Abel 21). Hence the famous lines of Jacques, Shakespeare’s philosopher of meta-theatre, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” The same notion is expressed by Calderon, who entitled one of his works *The Great Stage of the World* (1963). Abel stresses the importance of Bertolt Brecht and Luigi Pirandello in their endeavour of creating meta-theatre, calling the first one “the epistemologist of meta-theatre” and the second one its “logician”. Richard Hornby’s views expressed in the book *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* suggest a number of axioms for relating drama to reality. Hornby argues that “meta-drama can be defined as drama about drama, it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense drama itself” (Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* 31). The theatre of Tom Stoppard is not a traditional drama, but a post-modernist drama or a meta-theatre. Two prominent critics of Stoppard have found Stoppard’s interest in epistemological questions concerning perception of reality. Robert Gordon’s essay on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, and Jumpers’ *Text and Performance* (1991) discuss the relationship between reality and its mere illusion. Characters from Hamlet often invade the text of Stoppard. They do not speak meta-theatrical dialogue. Ros, Guil, and the Player speak meta-theatrical dialogues and create a lot of ambiguity in the drama. Ros and Guil express their metaphysical despair in their confused and bewildered conversation. Guil’s first lines of the plot give the main tone of the entire drama. Ros flips a coin straight five times, and announces it as “heads” five times. Guil remarks, “There is an art to the building up of suspense” (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 11).

The meta-theatrical remarks of Ros and Guil are absurd and critical in nature. They give a critical commentary on the action of the plot. Their comments are on the

action within the play. Ros and Guil remind the audience that they are watching a play. Ros and Guil make several attempts to exit the stage. Their meta-theatrical dialogues are brief, crisp and ambiguous. The Player is another ambiguous character. He shares the perspective of an audience. He is aware of the callous and mysterious destiny. Ros and Guil discover that Hamlet has changed letters. The Player and the Tragedians confront them, and the Player delivers the death sentence: "You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That's enough" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 122). The entire plot is loaded with the ambiguous blending of *Hamlet* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Stoppard has taken up the theme of death and its inevitable nature through the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whether it be a physical or a psychological death, bringing to the notion of the audience the reality of life. The themes of Stoppard are intellectual and philosophical. His plays depict the relationship between chaos and order. He has explored the relationship between free will and determinism. Stoppard is a modern realist. His play portrays reality in all its harsh, comic, ironic and pathetic forms. He reflects on death as an event in the journey of life. Stoppard's plays are filled with soft obscenities and scattered humour. Stoppard's characters are found discussing politics, philosophy, art, and belief which throw insights into the dynamics of contemporary theatre in Britain. Stoppard does not merely juxtapose the bits and pieces that he takes from various sources; he uses parody as a linking device to achieve a new synthesis. Stoppard likes to play with the theatrical possibilities of his themes: playing with ideas and forms, with dramatic devices and formulas, with situations, with a role and with words. Stoppard uses the device of parody following the tradition of Beckett,

Pirendello and Bakhtin who gave him a cannibalistic vision of the world. He is always laughing at eternity and certainty since he finds a profound ambiguity in every phenomenon.

Stoppard uses the device of inter-textuality to depict the absurdity of life. Shakespeare also found the symptoms of absurdity during Renaissance. Many of his tragic characters are alienated as they find life meaningless and devoid of purpose. King Lear has to fight with the world of appearances. Beckett's plays depict the situations when communication is broken down. The dialogues of Hamm and Clov reveal their inner void. Meaningful and causal action is expressed through gestures. Thus, Stoppard creates the same sense of stasis, of a nightmarish sense of paralysis in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*.

In the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* the character development disappears. Stoppard's characters describe certain typifying traits depicting the sense of cosmic confusion. Stoppard's language is quite the opposite of that of Beckett and Ionesco. Stoppard's verbal constructions dazzle and succeed in "withdrawing with style from chaos". *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is remarkable because it is packed with unconventional elements such as inter-textuality, play-within-play, silences and pauses. Stoppard uses Beckett's techniques, such as misunderstandings, anticlimax and afterthought. Stoppard freely borrowed from Hamlet the techniques of stereotyped expressions, punning and the use of parody. He does not want an individual to rely on a predetermined fate. This attitude may lead him to apathy and indolence.

Stoppard had Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in his mind when he wrote his play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The plot of the play is narrated through the

viewpoint of two courtiers echoing the themes of death and nihilistic despair. Stoppard depicts the theme of existential predicament of man in this drama. In *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are school friends. They are summoned by King Claudius to probe Hamlet's neurotic behaviour at court. They are ordered to escort Hamlet to England and execute him. Hamlet mistakenly kills Polonius and escapes. Claudius' plot proves counterproductive as executions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern result. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become the major characters. Stoppard's play becomes the story of two ordinary men who are trapped by unknown events. Stoppard's play can be compared to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. There are elements of absurdity used by Luigi Pirandello. Stoppard assumes that everything is "silly politics, religion, education, business" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 21). Paul Fussler was the cultural historian who first investigated the growth of this type of crude humour in the trenches of World War I. In Stoppard's play this type of "black humour" emerges repeatedly in the plot of the play:

Guil: "You can't be on a boat."

Ros: "I've frequently not been on boats."

Guil: "No, no, no-what you've been is not on boats."

Ros: "I wish I was dead" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 98).

The entire play addresses the issue of "ending" or "dying" and through such a focus offer to the audience the "black humour". Stoppard has used the techniques of the absurd using the tools of wit and irony to depict the absurdity of human situation. Since Stoppard is writing a modern play, his characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have to face the ambiguities and uncertainties of life in a formless universe. Stoppard has evolved a new style to depict the corrosion of self of the

protagonists who look confused and restless when they face reality. The beauty of the play lies in experimental language, such as repetition, music hall passages and “readymade language” on the pattern of Beckett and Ionesco. Stoppard freely uses stereotyped expressions, punning with double layers of meanings and the use of parody to handle the themes of madness and death. The protagonists like Lucky and Pozzo don’t know their purpose or direction of life:

Ros : “Where’s it going to end?”

Guil: “That’s the question.”

Ros: “It’s all questions.”

Guil: “Do you think it matters?”

Ros: “Doesn’t it matter to you?”

Guil: “Why should it matter?”

Ros: “What does it matter why?”

Guil (teasing gently): “Doesn’t it matter why it matters?”

Ros (rounding on him): “What’s the matter with you?” (Pause)

Guil: “It doesn’t matter” (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 32).

The play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* re-writes *Hamlet*. Stoppard blends Shakespeare’s dialogues with his own philosophy and word play. He also includes Beckett’s existentialism to depict the tragic deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Both the characters have been given the major roles though in *Hamlet* they are just minor characters. They play word games and engage in philosophical discussions because they are unable to cope with the harsh realities of absurd life. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are guided by the Player, a character

borrowed from *Hamlet* who understands their predicament and gives clues to them to solve the riddles of life.

Martin Esslin is of the strong view that absurdist drama abandons all the conventional theatre elements of plot, language, setting, and character and emphasizes the illogical nature of reality by making these elements appear illogical (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 6). An absurd play reflects the chaos of modern life. Stoppard's play lacks order, symmetry and purpose. Life does not progress as human beings wish. In the absurd drama many questions remain unanswered. There is chaos and disorder in the universe. Cohn observes that "mysteries remain unknowable and characters stay fixed in a rigid stasis of indecision and inaction" (Cohn, *Currents in Contemporary Drama* 21). Any kind of final, definite ending may yield a certain value to the story, which in turn, would transfer value to an insignificant, incongruous world. Communication in this absurd world is ineffective. Characters may speak and discuss but no solution comes out. Language becomes erratic and illusory. All discussion proves to be an exercise in futility. Esslin observes that "The verbal confusion only compounds the chaos and isolation the character feels within" (Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* 63). In contemporary terms, both have become the plays about nihilism and despair. The only truth lies in the absurd logic. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* there is a unique blending of levity and seriousness.

The Theatre of the Absurd often suggests a world of chaos and isolation. The setting of an absurd drama is disorderly and chaotic. There is no hero; all are trapped in an absurd situation. They find themselves in a nondescript void. They are seen confused and disturbed, unable to understand or control. The world of the play is

challenging and unrealistic and the characters are unable to cope with the situation. They look helpless and waste their time and energy in endless discussions. In *Waiting for Godot*, all the tramps waste their time in endless waiting leading themselves to fruitless result. Characters in this world lack the ability to act. They cannot bring any change or transformation. They possess no self-knowledge, or purpose of life. They are living in a void. They suffer from psychological abnormal behaviour and often have a very defective memory. Relationships in this world are almost devoid of depth. There is no love, no certainty and no meaningful existence. All the characters in the play are haunted by the ghost of death, ironically to all the characters, “death holds no terror” since a life in this chaotic world “is hardly precious” (Cohn, *Currents in Contemporary Drama* 20). “Horrors may pass unnoticed as they drown themselves in the pathetic day-to-day sequence of their lives” (Cohn 20). Consequently life, worldly pursuits, material goods, and death are ultimately defined as meaningless. The Theatre of the Absurd shows this meaninglessness by distorting the traditional theatre elements of plot, language, setting, characters and their world perspective.

Stoppard borrowed heavily from Beckett and Ionesco when he wrote *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*. Ronald Bryden writes that Stoppard’s play is highly indebted to *Waiting for Godot* and *New York Times* literary critic, Irving Wardle holds *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* to be a literary play with frank debts to Beckett. Comparison of the subject matter and characters of the two plays leaves no doubt of Stoppard’s connection to Beckett. In both plays, conflict is the result of the indecisive nature of the characters; the protagonists waste precious time in playing physical and verbal games; strange situations are further emphasized

with slapstick humour; and dialogue is often a vaudevillian pattern of one-liners between the two main characters. Stoppard spoke of this Beckettian influence of humour and language during a 1968 interview with Giles Gordon for the *Transatlantic Review*. Stoppard finds Beckett's way of qualifying everything funny.

Stoppard's acknowledgement of Beckett's use of humour within his plays is a commentary on Stoppard's own employment of comedy to communicate larger ideas within his own work. All his characters are lost and are trapped. They live in confusion. They are left to wait in the shadow of death. Stoppard's play is conditioned by determinism living with fractured identity. Fate rules all and all seem helpless creatures. All have to face the inevitability of all events. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the victims of unseen forces. As fatalists they believe that every action is the result of a series of cause and effect. They have to accept the uncontrollable situations. Everything in life is preordained. All characters are puppets, no one can do anything. There is no quest in their life; it is always a journey into darkness and chaos. There is no hope and no free will.

The play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* deals with the theme of loss of identity. The plot of the play reveals an intense anguish when the identity gets fractured. The loss of identity of the protagonists brings them a sense of despair. They are too weak to comprehend the absurdity of human existence. They look baffled throughout the drama. Stoppard discusses the supremacy of fate thus:

I'd have to say that I'm using Shakespeare as a symbol of God, which I'm not prepared to say. I have written about two people on whom Shakespeare imposed inevitability, but I haven't got a philosophy figured out for you (Fleming, *New Writing and Writers* 5).

The dislocation and the loss of identity is intensified by the breakdown of language communication. *Hamlet* is loaded with the scenes of intense anguish and mental suffering. Stoppard has depicted man's relation to the world and the cosmos in a new perspective. In his drama, the world of Elsinore has changed radically. The king is not a representative of God. He is a villainous usurper who has disturbed the moral order. Stoppard investigates a determinist universe, governed by a capricious fate. All the characters are trapped in a world of inaction and inertia. There is no sense of security or direction. They are forced to live in chaos and disorientation only. Reality is totally contingent in the world of Stoppard.

The play is loaded with the allusions to fatalism. In Act III, Ros and Guil are seen on a boat, as Guil tells Ros, "I'm very fond of boats myself. I like the way they're contained. You don't have to worry about which way to go, or whether to go at all the question doesn't arise" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 100). They have limited freedom in a wide universe. They find themselves as slaves to omnipotent current. The limited freedom restrains them to enjoy life endlessly. Guil questions Ros in anxiety:

Guil: "What was it?"

Ros: "What?"

Guil: "Heads or tails?"

Ros: "Oh, I didn't look."

Guil: "Yes, you did."

Ros: "Oh did I?" (He takes out a coin, studies it.) "Quite right-it rings a bell."

Guil: "What's the last thing you remember?"

Ros: "I don't wish to be reminded of it" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 47).

Ros and Guil cannot do what they like. They are unable to fight against death. They realize that there are irrevocable forces that rule and govern man. They move towards death with no power to change its course. Ros expresses his desire to break the chains of slavery by jumping out of the boat. He soon discovers that he is truly powerless. He soon realizes that it could be part of “their” plan for him to jump to his death. Ros and Guil find the secret of their presence on the boat. They are to deliver a letter to the English king that orders Hamlet’s execution. Here again Ros and Guil act in a passive manner. They refuse to act to save Hamlet’s life. Hamlet acts quickly and switches the letter ordering his death. The fate of Ros and Gul is sealed. It is too late for Ros and Guil to discover the letter now. They can do nothing to save themselves. Ros and Guil are slaves to the deterministic fate. They are only willing to do what they are told, and looked helpless and defeated. The characters of Stoppard cannot express their identity. They become faceless and passive because they are living in a formless world. Stoppard dramatizes this situation using the farcical elements. As the plot progresses, the comical and farcical actions become symbolic of their loss of identity.

The Theatre of the Absurd depicts the metaphysical conflict between order and chaos prevalent in the world. In the plays of Beckett and Ionesco the theme of chaos and struggle of life is predominant. The main focus of Stoppard is to explore the nature of chaos which grips our life. Man cannot comprehend his role in chaos. The play is a grotesque comedy. The play depicts the importance of human action and choice. The life of an individual is very complex and he cannot comprehend it. Man has the freedom to make a choice in life but he doesn’t know the repercussions of his choice. The results of man’s actions are unpredictable and in making a choice

he ultimately suffers. His freedom is not a source of happiness and eventually he emerges as a helpless victim in a chaotic universe. Human beings are caught in the whirlpool of complexities of life. They become agents that create as much chaos as order. For Stoppard the most unpredictable entity in the universe is the individual. Stoppard uses wit, humour and irony to depict the inner anguish and traumatic existence of his protagonists who are directionless and visionless. Stoppard brings his characters into a new world where the elements of absurdity are disguised under a mask of order and reason worn by a society which Stoppard makes us see as being absurd.

The grotesque effect is intensified because of the grotesque presentation of the serious predicament of the characters. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern experience great metaphysical anguish of the modern man. They have no faith in an almighty God. Stoppard depicts the theme of determinism. Human beings are forced to live in a world controlled by a capricious fate. His device of intertextual allusion is very effective to portray the fractured identities of the protagonists. He imitates Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in writing dialogues that echo the metaphysical despair of his characters. The speech patterns and rhythms of characters reinforce the original theme in *Hamlet*. The plot of the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is controlled and governed by chance, divine intervention and physical laws. Stoppard is very serious about the theme of loss of identity and corrosion of self of the protagonists. In the opening scene, the game of tossing coins goes against the laws of probability. The opening scene of the play intensifies confusion in the minds of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

The conflict between appearance and reality is found in the text of *Hamlet*. Stoppard continues the same conflict in his drama also. The boundaries between appearance and reality become blurred as Hamlet is forced to re-establish these boundaries for himself. Stoppard begins his play with a comic action. He has depicted the absurdity of existence in the very beginning of the plot. The protagonists live in a confused world. They fail to understand the difference between appearance and reality. It is a world devoid of meaning; there is no fixed point of existence for the characters. The Player also confirms this when he says that "... uncertainty is the normal state. You're nobody special" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 47). Appearance and reality stand in stark contrast to one another. There is no scope of identity formation; the Player echoes modern man's confusion and his fruitless quest for identity: "For some of us it is performance, for others, patronage. They are two sides of the same coin, or, let us say, being as there are so many of us, the same side of two coins" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 25). Thus we find that 'appearance' and 'reality' is relative in the world of Stoppard. There are no absolutes in the world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They are destined to die at the end of the drama. A letter written by Hamlet to the King of England seals their fate. Stoppard depicts how both the protagonists are trapped in a situation from where there is no escape. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern recognize their impending doom in the letter. They cannot change their fate. Joseph Duncan explains, "The courtiers become part of a pattern of events- whose cause or purpose they do not understand- which they cannot or will not escape and which both gives them their only identity and carries them to their deaths" (65).

The play *Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead*, relied on existentialism. According to William S. Sahakian, existentialism contains five central facets. The Existentialists believe that reality has two faces; the subjective realm and the objective realm. Sahakian observes that “the objective world is also known as the outside world composed of an inexorable law, of cause and effect, of chronological clock-ticking time, of flux, of mechanism” (Sahakian, *Staying Well after Psychosis* 355). Guildenstern’s failure to glean the purpose of his and Rosencrantz’s situation through scientific and logical methods highlights this point throughout the play. Secondly, an Existentialist is responsible for creating his own value system and defining who he is as an individual. The third belief is that each human is a free agent, capable of choosing his or her own destiny, that “each of us is king of our own subjective world” (Sahakian 566). Life is what each man chooses it to be. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern choose failure. Fate controls their lives. They suffer anxiety and restlessness because of their failure and wrong choice.

The fourth tenet of Existentialism is that the highly wrought and tightly organized objective world is absurd. The hostile world stands over and against human beings. Man can express his free will. He can struggle to bring new hopes and changes in life. He can dream of success and happiness. But the forces in the universe are always against man. They block his progress and interfere in his actions. The hard truth for the Existentialist is that much of the outer world is beyond his control. He is free on a boat for a time to fall a victim to the cruel clutches of an absurd world. Stoppard deals with the theme of the paradox of free will. The external forces are transcendent and they intervene man’s actions. The results of his actions are beyond his control. He seems helpless. Stoppard argues that

man is free to move in the world. He can do what he likes. But the paradox is that the world itself is bound to its own rules and limitations. The world is incomprehensible and absurd. Man can revolt against such absurdity. The choice of action is always personal. But its consequences are disastrous.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern live in a world of total confusion and remain directionless and lost. They toss the coins in the beginning of the play. They are unable to remember where they are headed. They do not know the purpose of their journey, they remain bewildered and lost. They even cannot comprehend the external forces that crush them. The bizarre coin episode of the beginning symbolizes their ambiguous and directionless motives. Their speeches are loaded with comical ironies; they look frustrated, lonely and despirited by the world's incomprehensibility and fall into despair. Stoppard frequently uses the weapons of wit, irony and repartee to depict the confusion for comic effect. The paralyzing confusion of the protagonists depicts their existential agony. They don't know where they are living and what their purpose of life is. They are too fragile and helpless to comprehend the mysterious universe. They remain confused and bewildered in the entire drama. They are pushed by the random forces of death, destruction and chaos. Stoppard repetitively uses the word 'Dead' to depict the confusion in the mind of characters:

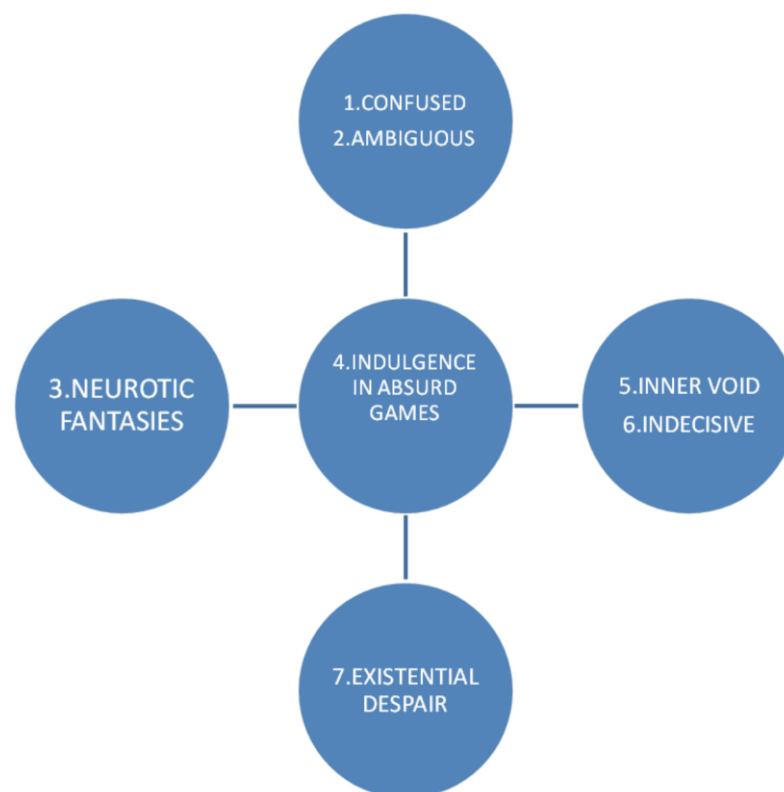
Ros: "Dead."

Guil: "Dead!"

Ros (panic): "I can't feel a thing!" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 78).

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are passive anti-hero protagonists, the victims of their false illusions and fantasies. Their vision of life is comic, meaningless and confused. Confronted with the randomness of reality, they don't try to resist it but embrace the very thing that is tormenting. Stoppard has depicted the sentiments of confusion and mystery in his music-hall passages. The existential freedom of choice is the birthright of man according to Sartre. In the world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the idea of personal independence is touched upon in the beginning of the plot. Their inaction seals their fates. Indeed, Stoppard has employed the elements of existentialism in the plot. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trapped in an incomprehensible world.

The Play as a Metaphor of Absurdity: The Existential Journey of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern into absurdity



The characters in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* wait, but never change while the characters in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* have to change. On the surface level, the plot of the drama is very simple. The dramatist assumes that the audience is aware of the existential predicaments of Prince Hamlet. As Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter Elsinore Castle, they become the victims of mysterious and inscrutable fate. The uses of fluid images and a blending of intertextualization intensify the absurdity of the drama. In Act III, Rosencrantz pretends to be the King of England and hurls questions at Guildenstern regarding their reasons for bringing Hamlet to England (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 108). Rosencrantz is so much lost in his role-playing that he forgets that he is not the King and tears open the letter containing Hamlet's death sentence. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not Stoppard's only characters that are preoccupied with role-playing. The Player is always in character just as Guildenstern surmises in Act I (34).

For the Player, role-playing has become a reality. The Player is fully aware of his role as a performer. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fail in their assumed roles. The duo continues in their role-play until Guildenstern's confrontation with the Player in Act III. On the boat to England, Guildenstern stabs the Player. The audience is tricked into believing that Guildenstern has actually killed the Player. In fact, the Player discusses his failure in staging a real death. Stoppard's use of the "play metaphor" is a significant dramatic device to depict the existential struggle of man. In real life, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are often assigned roles in society to perform but they fail because they lack the certainty of life, the invincible spirit of Oedipus, the King and the rocklike courage of Orestes. Stoppard's use of meta-theatre is quite effective in conveying the absurdity of human existence. No wonder

the situation of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is like Hamm and Clov of *Endgame* of Beckett. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are involved in a game of question and answer. Their pursuit of answers only produces more questions. Several clues contained within character dialogue support this theory of a cyclic journey for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The Player's first conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's in Act I also points to a continuing story: "We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off which a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit is being an entrance somewhere else" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 21).

Guildenstern's dialogue on the boat to England in Act III continues this thread of repeated events: "But you don't believe anything till it happens. And it has all happened. Hasn't it?" (84). And Guildenstern's moment of clarity, before disappearing at the play's end, is that: "Well, we'll know better next time" (98). The playwright gives the audience a series of visual clues about the nature of this world. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are outsiders. The duo have no idea where they are or what possible direction to take to reach their destination. This setting is not bound by laws of physics and logic, a fact proven by the flip of a coin. Guildenstern takes the coin flip as a "sign, an indication of some higher meaning beyond a game; but he is unable to decipher its message" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 11). The second point introduced at the play's beginning by the coin, is the actual nature of this world. With the law of odds not working in the coin flip, the audience clearly understands that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern occupy another plane of existence. It is a world drawn from the familiar structure of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but one with its own set of rules as well.

Stoppard's theme of ambiguity within the world of the play is established with the flip of a coin. It would also indicate that money for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern has more than monetary value. For the duo, the coin becomes a tangible object to connect with as they drift through an unpredictable world. Rosencrantz returns to the coin throughout the play in an effort to find security. Once at the castle, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are enticed to spy on Hamlet by the "Reward as fits a King's remembrance" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 31). This thought of a possible financial gain is shortly abandoned by the two in favour of another diversion, a game of question and answer. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bring the subject of money up a final time on the boat to England in Act III. Rosencrantz plays a game of "guess the hand" and then "cheats to ensure Guildenstern's winning" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 103). The game is disrupted by an argument over how much money Claudius gave each of them. Stoppard's use of money in the play, suggests the postmodern device of questioning societal values. In this world, as the two characters exhibit little comprehension of the past or their future, the value of money for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is based on tangible amusements of the moment. Money and its worth is based on a societal system that is disconnected from the two. Security, for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in their environment, purpose and direction is the greatest value held by the duo. From a semiotic perspective, Stoppard's use of the coin can also be interpreted as a connecting image to Hamlet as a source for the play. The sign of the coin, of two sides connected by a common element, is a metaphor for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Stoppard has connected to the world of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The two plays share characters, plot lines, and resolutions, but Stoppard's

story is told from an entirely different point of view. It is as if the playwright has flipped the coin of Hamlet over and shown this world from the other side. As Guildenstern says in Elsinore: "Words, words. They're all we have to go on" (41). Stoppard refers to the seasons, the sun and the stars. There are also references to colours, animals, smoke, baked earth, night, the ocean's current, and the wind. Nature is used as a model of order amid chaos. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern use intellect and logic as means of comprehending purpose and direction. The natural world is a world of harmony and balance but Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's existence is uncertain.

Stoppard begins the play in a place without form or character. After twenty-six pages of dialogue, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are magically transported into Hamlet's world of Elsinore. The playwright uses this structural device of jolting the title characters from one setting to another, as a means of revealing deeper truths. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern desire, not only mental security, but also physical security. The duo is transported from one setting to another, without warning, and as a result, internal and external equilibrium is never found by the two. The main action is to depict Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's continual state of uncertainty.

In Act I's transition between settings, Stoppard uses the coin as a symbol. Each major shift in dramatic action for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is preceded by a revelation of truth. The certainty of the coin flip turning up heads is destroyed by Rosencrantz's discovery of tails. In Elsinore Castle, Claudius' understanding of the deeper message contained within the Tragedians' dumb show during Act II, motivates the King to send Hamlet, along with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to England. The duo's discovery of the two letters on the boat and the Player's staged

death near the end of Act III expose Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's perceptions of reality as only illusions. Nothing in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's world is what it seems and the breaking of those perceptions propels the two characters forward into greater uncertainty. The two letters in Act III reinforce this illusory state of being for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and motivate their attempt to find outside direction for their lives. Charged by Claudius to escort Hamlet to England, the duo is given a letter of introduction by the King. As Guildenstern states with certainty, "Everything is explained in the letter. We count on that" (81). When the letter is opened and read by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the true nature of their voyage is revealed; once in England, Hamlet is to be executed. Despite the initial misgivings, Guildenstern reasons away Hamlet's impending death: This letter and the crucial moral decision it presents suggest Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's dependency on others for their knowledge of the world (Fleming, *New Writing and Writers* 58). This inaction, which is fuelled by dependency, occurs again when Hamlet replaces the original letter with a forged copy; this time the letter calls for the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. After Hamlet disappears from the boat following the pirates' attack, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in a state of panic. Trying to decide what their next move should be, they again look to the letter for guidance.

Guildenstern emerges as the real seeker of truth in the drama. While Rosencrantz is content to accept circumstances, Guildenstern aggressively questions. Starting with the coin flip, the indefinable nature of the coin turning up heads begins a litany of approaches from Guildenstern to explain this phenomenon; probability, natural forces, or supernatural forces and even faith is called into question. Stoppard gives Guildenstern a variety of intellectual tools, such as the Socratic method along

with syllogistic and scientific approaches to discerning truth. Guildenstern's scattershot method of inquiry along with the shared trait of little substantial experience keeps him in the same state of uncertainty as Rosencrantz. With Stoppard's emphasis on the variety of methodology that Guildenstern uses to explain the world around him, it is possible to detect an underlying commentary through dramatic irony from the playwright. Guildenstern clearly is learned (we know he attended university with Hamlet), but the character's failings suggest that bookish knowledge is not enough to live life. Stoppard's characterization of Guildenstern fits the old axiom, "book smart, but worldly dumb." Through his postmodern approach to the play, Stoppard has created character types devoid of dimension, rather than fully realized figures. For Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the shallowness of their existence is typified by their limited knowledge of the past. In an effort to find a reference point for their current state, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pause for a moment in Act I to reflect on their beginning.

As John Bennett states "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in touch with no past, and so they can neither construe the present nor direct themselves purposefully towards the future" (Bennett, *Travesties* 48). The past for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is fragmented at best, and at worst, it is a lie. Stoppard has intentionally excluded a back-story for the two characters to further enhance their isolation and constant state of uncertainty. Dependent on outward direction as well, Guildenstern looks for a sign for guidance. He expresses his sense of uncertainty thus: "We have not been... picked out... simply to be abandoned... set loose to find our way" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 14).

The search for a sign becomes a focus for Guildenstern. A story of a mystical encounter with a unicorn in Act I illustrates Guildenstern's need for outer guidance, a character pattern that will continue throughout the play. With the arrival of the Tragedians, Guildenstern's hope for a clear sign from the newcomers is destroyed by the Player's offer to perform *The Rape of the Sabine Women*. Guildenstern feels restless when he comes to know that he is lost. It is his greatest source of anxiety. Yet, despite setbacks, the character remains vigilant in his pursuit of answers. Unlike Rosencrantz's use of games as a distraction, the question game in Act I becomes a comforting method for Guildenstern to understand their situation. The flaw in the question game, as a means of creating security, is that it produces only questions and no answers for the duo. Time and again, Guildenstern realizes the shallowness of his and Rosencrantz's existence: "There must have been a moment at the beginning, where we could have said - no. But somehow we missed it" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 98).

Guildenstern breaks free of that idea to entertain the possibility of self-determination. Stoppard's return to the device of the characters confusing each other's names during this last moment in Act III illustrates Guildenstern's need for assurance. Guildenstern calls out to Rosencrantz and after getting no response, he calls his own name out and receives no reply. As a figure perpetually looking for certainty in life, this last moment for Guildenstern proves that even a connection to a name can be past experiences and with no tangible foundation in which to base decisions, any action taken by the two is doomed to fail from the start. Knowledge holds no essence for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They are essentially children exposed to the world and left to fend for themselves with no concrete experiences on

which to draw. Rosencrantz provides the counter-balance to Guildenstern's aggressive approach to their world. It is only through his partner's prodding that Rosencrantz reconnects to their only known past, an episode from that morning. The motivation that Rosencrantz generates by piecing together memories, the royal summons, and his and Guildenstern's journey, is quickly halted by the Tragedians' music. This trait of stop-and-start movements, both physical and mental, is consistently shown by Rosencrantz throughout the play. Rosencrantz abandons moments of contemplation for amusing distraction, as typified by the coin flip and the sleight-of-hand game in all three Acts. For Rosencrantz, there is security in the familiar: "Consistency is all I ask!" (30), he says at one point, and the coin becomes a symbol of that safety. The coin is an outlet for Rosencrantz, an escape from dwelling too long on the uncertainty of the moment. Stoppard also uses the device of the coin to highlight the character's estrangement from past experiences. At Elsinore Castle, Rosencrantz performs a unique action. He spins a coin in the air, looks at it, and puts the coin back in his pocket. Rosencrantz cannot understand this mysterious action.

A trait Rosencrantz shares with Guildenstern is a dependency on outside guidance. He is continually looking for obvious signs to give him substance and direction. His encounters with the Tragedians, the Player, and the Royal Family of Elsinore offer no help. Rosencrantz's childlike nature places him at the mercy of outside elements and authorities, the majority of which do not have his best interest at heart. He has no concrete tools for survival; he is ill equipped to face the challenges that an independent agent needs to have. Guildenstern's line, "We've had no practice" (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz* 32) is the simplest explanation for this habitual

dependency. Rosencrantz's childlike innocence returns during his last moments before disappearing: "We've done nothing wrong. We didn't harm anyone did we?" (97). For Rosencrantz, the thought of doing wrong to another person seems to be the concern. At the end, Rosencrantz is the innocent bystander, incapable of malice. Rosencrantz's realization that he is a victim of circumstance is what brings poignancy to his last moment before disappearing. This attitude held by the Tragedians is based on the truth that life is always in a state of flux.

Thus the textual analysis of the play reveals that the journey of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a search for purpose and meaning in life. Inaction proves to be their greatest character flaw. Indeed, Stoppard's main focus is to depict the force of absurd reality in this play. Stoppard takes the audience to an absurd world in this drama. It is the only play of Stoppard where the strict rules of existence are followed. Beckett's *Godot* and *Endgame* also subscribe to the belief that man has no role to play. Stoppard's *Rosencrantz*, however, is based on the idea that man plays a defined role. But his role and its result is decided by fate. It is an admitted fact that Stoppard uses Beckett's absurdist tendencies as a model, but makes many innovations reacting against the traditional absurdist play. Stoppard differs from Beckett as he gives different roles to his characters. They have positive freedom to act. Vladimir and Estragon are nobodies in Beckett's *Godot*. We don't know much about them. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become more real to the audience. Stoppard gives them a fixed identity and a task of incomprehensible existence. They are Elizabethan courtiers summoned to Elsinore. They are on a mission to kill Hamlet. They have to know the cause of Hamlet's lunacy. They are the friends of Hamlet and hence very close to him. Therefore, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern look

more realistic than Lucky and Pozzo of Beckett. Their ways to confront the meaningless existence is more real than Vladimir and Estragon. In this manner, the structure of *Rosencrantz* is linear and not cyclical.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are always haunted by the fear of death. They are obsessed with contemplating their deaths. The main purpose of Stoppard is to explore the mystery of death and the role of external agencies in this drama. In Beckett's *Godot*, death does not give release to Lucky and Pozzo. No character dies in Beckett's play. Unlike *Godot* and *Endgame*, death does come at the end of the play. The play ends with the triumph of external forces. Death is supreme and is inevitable. Stoppard gives the message of the futility of life. The play ends with the jailer wearing the condemned man's hood while the prisoner has the executioner's mask on. Having exchanged these attributes, symbolic of their roles in society and the parts they are supposed to play, they have, in a sense, changed their identities.

Chapter 8

The Junkies and Neurotics of Jack Gelber: Disintegration of Self in *The Connection*

In post World War II era, the people living in Europe and America were confronted with new challenges and existential problems. The writers of the West came under the influence of the nihilism of Nietzsche as they struggled to find any meaning of life in the hostile universe. Kafka's *The Trial*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Camus' *The Stranger* depicted the corrosion of self. Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* greatly influenced the ideas and vision of the contemporary dramatists. Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1953) became a yardstick by which all the contemporary plays in the genre were measured. Absurdist drama flourished in America in the tradition of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter depicting the themes of alienation, depression and corrosion of self. The spirit of nihilism gripped the Americans, as Paul Hurley observes that the Americans are trapped in an absurd situation from which there is no escape. The situation is similar to Holocaust with Fate and God being invisible and there is no help from the external forces.

Jack Gelber was born in Chicago and is mainly famous as the playwright of drug addiction depicting the corrosion of self of the contemporary American people. He was influenced by Pirandello, Brecht and Samuel Beckett. He was an unconventional dramatist and sought to establish a connection between the stage performers and the audience. His play *The Connection* was first produced in The Living Theatre and ran over more than 700 performances. *The Connection* gives a metaphor of human need in the form of a heroin fix. The essential feature of the play

is non-action. Contrary to the traditional drama, the play of Gelber has very little action. There is essentially no movement in the plot of this two-act play. The Junkies are seen waiting in the pad of Leach in desperate mood. The title is used to establish a connection between the theatre goers and the performers using the techniques of Brecht and Beckett. The atmosphere of the drama reminds us of the action of the traditional plays of Clifford Odets and O'Neill. Odets and O'Neill dealt with the themes of sleep and death in the plays *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), *Iceman Cometh* (1939) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1955). Gelber's theme is meaninglessness of life. The plot does not appear formless and the dialogues broken and fragmented like the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Genet. *The Connection* deals with the themes of intimacy, meta-representation and heroin culture. Interestingly, Gelber does not hate or condemn the heroin culture as the play doesn't rely on disturbing imagery; the action dramatizes the loss of communication and the existential absurdity of humanity.

The critics lambasted Gelber for his dope theme. Brooks Atkinson, the editor of *The New York Times*, stated that Jack Gelber's play, *The Connection*, set new standards for "brutality and realism" in theatre. Gelber followed Shakespeare's Hamlet using a "play within a play" format to dramatize the conversation of junkies who are waiting for the Cowboy. Gelber like Beckett introduced free-flowing dialogue of the junkies in broken language; the communication gives the audience the unnerving experience that they are not watching a drama but are standing in a lonely street corner waiting for the Cowboy as all are hooked. Gelber establishes a direct contact with the audience as the junkies ask for the drug money. The critics had divergent opinion about *The Connection*; some of them found it quite

interesting, the real theatre and innovative, but others dismissed it as a trash. Some critics praised the new theme of *The Connection* and *New York Times* published a full length article on Edward and Gelber in 1960 since the critics accused Gelber of nihilism. Gelber defended his play in the “Introduction” thus:

My play...is an anti-phony play, which hits hard at sentimentality. But there is faith in it, not in terms of a hero who finds his own salvation; but in terms of the continuity of life (Gelber, *The Connection* 2).

The plot of the play unfolds inside a Greenwich village apartment in the late 1950s as a group of junkies wait for a “fix”. In the play some characters deliver monologues; several jazz men play at intervals to relieve the tensions of the audience. The main thrust of the drama is the lives of jazz musicians and the fate of the junkies. Jim Dunn first appears on the stage. Jaybird introduces himself as the producer of the drama. The members of the Jazz band participate and comment on the activities of the characters. The performance of a jazz quartet in the sordid living pad of Leach adds some spice in the action of the drama. Most of the critics of Gelber including Brooks Atkinson praised the presence of the jazz as it adds new flavour, it has a quaint stagy feel as it captures the spirit of the junkies. Harding observes that as the play progresses, the division between art and life gets blurred again. According to Harding, the Living Theatre tried to use expression to create a sense of frustrated desire and out of this awareness, action. The performers-audience involvement was noted by many critics as it was a new technique developed by Gelber. David Callaghan observes that for many of The Living Theatre’s productions, the audience is as much a participant as those onstage. The

performances of Gelber's *The Connection* build a relationship between the actors and the audience and evoke many questions that are answered automatically.

Gelber's *The Connection* depicts the actors addicted and performing in a realistic style. Their languid monologues are poetic and touching. The atmosphere of the drama is nihilistic and the world is in chaos. There is no sense of security as all the junkies are seen moving here and there, pushing the furniture and fear-stricken. They are waiting for the Cowboy and respite comes to them with the arrival of the Cowboy. The main thesis of Gelber is that in the contemporary society man can get relief only through drug and sleep. Conflict pervades society and the closest of human relationships. *The Connection* addresses the issue of meaninglessness in the world as Brustein comments: "Life may be by default meaningless, but it will go on, so why not construct our own meaning" (Brustein, *Seasons of Discontent* 33). The characters in the play don't grow; they don't construct meaning for themselves. Robert Brustein observed that the focus of Gelber in *The Connection* is in the banality of the lives of characters and their problem of communication as what they say in the entire play is nonsense. Like Edward Albee, Gelber depicts the theme of breakdown of communication and finally desperation and death in American culture.

Edward Albee was quoted in Gelber's 2003 *New York Times* obituary as saying: "I was so affected and energized by *The Connection*... it was exciting, dangerous, instinctive, and terrifying, all things theatre should be." Brooks Atkinson observed that the background of Jazz band and the photographers and the repeated interruptions of Jim and Jaybird merely serve as distractions to the audience. In Atkinson's view, the play is less of drama and more of experience. It is pertinent to note that the sick sense of voyeurism seems quite central to the thematic content of the drama. Solly says to the audience:

“Perhaps Jaybird has chosen this petty and miserable microcosm because of its self-annihilating aspects. This tells us something about Jaybird, but nothing about me. Sam. Someone, say something. Say something to the customers” (Gelber, *The Connection* 40).

Jack Gelber expects the audience to be judgmental and unsympathetic to the plight of the junkies. *The Connection succeeds in creating* the sense of one against the irrational world which is a recurrent motif in existential and absurdist writing. Unlike Beckett’s *Godot*, Gelber’s *Godot* does show up in the play in the character of Cowboy who provides heroin for the characters. The play depicts a rejection of meaninglessness as the junkies long for dope to relieve themselves from the psychic tensions of life. The Cowboy brings them their fix so that they might slide back into their hazy illusions. The characters do not grow, they do not construct meaning for themselves and they live in a hellish world. Leach dies of an overdose but his death goes waste as his fellow junkies don’t learn any lesson from his death and continue their lives exactly as before. He asks Solly: “All sentiment aside, why don’t you cats kick junk?” (92). Solly responds thus:

“I look out of this window and watch the crowds looking into store windows. I try to remember that they are u beings. Most of the time, it doesn’t make sense. When I talk, I’m pessimist. Yet, I want to live. I don’t jump into the street against the lights and just miss killing of a hundred times a day. That’s what happens out there. And in here, too. Why are some hunted and others hunt? The tyranny of the majority” (Gelber, *The Connection* 92).

The play frequently repeats the theme of nihilism, death and corrosion of self as all the characters including the audience get involved in the absurdist situation where there is no escape. Camus aptly remarks that human beings are in a gas chamber, where there is no exit. The junkies remain cut off from the mainstream of life, their conversation is meaningless and directionless, it is no doubt frustration for the audience too. Leach, the main protagonist remarks in the beginning of the play thus: "I'm saving all the heroin that I can put it in vitamin pills. Can't you see in the whole world being hooked without them knowing?" (Gelber, *The Connection* 92). Sam's long diatribe a little later further expresses the nihilistic tone of the drama and the theme of death and destruction. Sam talks about the routine engagements of the people, their routine challenges of life, "the next dollar, or the tension to get new coat" (92), and he believes that dope alone is the solution of life for the American culture has degenerated and mankind is at the crossroad.

"That taste comes back to your mouth. And that's what you want. That taste. That little taste. If you don't find it there you look some other place. And you're running, man. Running. It doesn't matter how or why it started. You don't think about anything and you start going back, running back" (Gelber, *The Connection* 31).

Solly is the spokesperson of Gelber who gives the clear message of the intrinsic meaning of life. He criticizes those people who don't realize their existential situation, the people are "hypocrites", they are addicts about other things of life which don't take them anywhere and their condition is worse than the junkies. Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1959) dramatizes the world of junkies who are seen hanging around for their "fix". It is a world without heroes as all the protagonists are

addicts, neurotics and escapist from the alienation as well as the grim sordidness of the contemporary American life. Gripped by the existential despair and helplessness, the Yankees turned junkies treat heroin as the only means for getting peace and ecstatic bliss. Drug addiction in its most unpleasant forms, as practised by mental degenerates became the bane of American life and behaviour. Reflecting this degeneration, all the characters in *The Connection* are drug addicts, weary of life and society. They are lost souls looking for an unnatural stimulant which might give them “guts” to survive. The play begins as an “improvised” theatre with its producer, Jim Dunn, insisting upon the unreality of the play:

“I and this entire evening on stage are merely a fiction. And don’t be fooled by anything anyone tells you. Except the jazz... what I mean to say is that we are not actually using real heroin” (Gelber, *The Connection* 19).

But as the action develops, the audience feels involved in the loneliness and frustration of the addicts and identifies their own weary and sterile existence. Richard Gileman observes:

The addicts are seen hanging around for their fix. They are engaged in activity of an extreme solipsism and ineffectuality. Gelber makes a serious poetic statement of an existential situation. Behind everything lay bitterness and mockery, solitude and metaphysical anguish. We are addicts of one kind or another, and we all have a Cowboy for whom we wait (Gileman, *Common and Uncommon Masks* 174).

The setting of the play is a dilapidated New York tenement apartment. The protagonists wander about the stage with a curious combination of listlessness and nervousness. Tired and weary, they appear to have barely enough energy to move about and occasionally they don't seem to think that it is worth the effort. They become aware of the audience's presence and look at them vacantly. The most dominant role of these addicts is their inactivity; they don't do anything, for there is nothing left in their life to do. They are gripped with the consciousness of the futility of life; there is nothing which can sustain or stimulate them except heroin. They seem to have been weary of the active roles and all they can do is to "wait" eternally for a "fix" like the doomed protagonists of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Instead of performing heroic deeds, they seek euphoria to get lost in drug ecstasy. They desperately wait for the dope-purveyor to arrive and supply them the required drug. They debate about the arrival of the drug supplier and in their conversation; the audience come to know about their miserable and sordid past. Gelber has depicted their harrowing experiences, their metaphysical loneliness, nausea and despair through simple but heart rending dialogues. Kenneth Tynan remarks that the junkies of Gelber are disinterested in life and its activities. They don't consider themselves as victims or heroes but as absentees from the mundane world.

Leach is the main protagonist and it is in the pad of this of "snarling, snickering, putative epicene hipster" that the action takes place. He is the most dominating junky because he has acquired such an amazing capacity for drugs that he can no longer become crazy. The boil on his neck does not bother him: "Oh! This boil. Damn this boil. Dream World. Narcotics. I live comfortable. I'm not a Bowery bum" (Gelber, *The Connection* 21). The junkies flock to this "King of the junky

world” because they need his “hard earned connection to supply them with heroin” (21) He is not happy with the life he is leading; rather, he is fed up with the dull talk of the junkies around him: “Cowboy, Cowboy, you rotten junkies. Is that all you can think about is dope? Dope? Dope?” (27). However, his own aspirations are vicious and degrading: “I’m saving the entire heroin I can so that I can put it in vitamin pills” (27), to infect the whole world with the heroin. Leach’s addiction is not peculiar to him; it is a manifestation of the universal urge in mankind to seek ecstasy:

“I used to think that the people who walk the streets, the people who work every day, the people who worry so much about the next dollar, the next new coat, the chlorophyll addicts, the aspirin addicts, the vitamin addicts, those people are hooked worse than me. Worse than me Hooked!” (Gelber, *The Connection* 31).

Gripped by the existential despair, the Yankees turned junkies treat heroin as the only means for getting peace and ecstatic bliss. They are mental degenerates and they think that drug is the only panacea left for them. As the action progresses, the weary and sterile life of the junkies is revealed and their existential frustration assumes universal proportions. Richard Gileman aptly observes thus: “Behind everything lay bitterness and mockery, solitude and metaphysical anguish. We are all addicts of one kind or another, and we all have a Cowboy for whom we wait” (Gileman, *Common and Uncommon Masks* 174). The junkies are lost and fragmented protagonists suffering from the corrosion of self, there is no activity in their life; their time is spent in waiting for their dope-purveyor to arrive. The world of the junkies is a world of frenzy, they have no interest in life and worldly affairs

and their relationship to society is not one of enmity but of truancy. Thus the junkies act as non-entities; they lead a meaningless existence that makes no difference to the people around them. The life of the junkies is neither glorified nor sentimentalized; their broken spirits underline their moral and spiritual decadence as they emerge symbols of the corrosion of self. The play transcends the theme of addiction by exploring the causes of the corrosion of self. If for George in Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the illusion mongering is an antidote to sterility of life, these junkies desperately seek dope to become oblivious of the fever and fret of their sordid life.

Leach finds many junkies anxiously looking at his behaviour. He protests: "What I'm hungry! It's my place, why shouldn't I eat?" (Gelber, *The Connection* 3). The audience stares at Leach and the junkies look like animals in a zoo. They are waiting for the Cowboy to arrive with his magical drug. They believe that the drug soothes everybody. As the goal of everybody in this world is to achieve happiness and self-contentment, various means are adopted-legal, moral and immoral. Richard Kostelanetz goes to the extent of observing thus:

Gelber suggests that, given the chance, half the audience would surrender square credentials and be initiated into the narcotic life. Dope addiction becomes a possible choice, an effective way to achieve what society considers worthwhile (Kostelanetz, *The Connection: Heroin as Existential Choice* 162).

Of course, it is difficult to agree with Kostelanetz. In reality, dope is not a source of pleasure and contentment but makes man dull, passive, morbid, and mentally sick and physically sullen. No wonder, in their neurotic escape, the addicts

are seen selfish, mean and piggish. There is no attempt to grapple with the sufferings of life: their vision is lopsided and they are haunted by death-consciousness. Solly tells the truth about heroin when he says:

“Suicide is not uncommon among us. The seeking of death is at once fascinating and repellent. The overdose of heroin is where that frail line of life and death swings in a silent breeze of ecstatic summer” (Gelber, *The Connection* 41).

Haunted by death, the neurotic hipsters indulge in lewd and licentious talks or homosexual perversions. That makes Leach’s pad a dreary, baleful and shabby hell where the addicts are seen fighting “sex battles” in frenzy. Their chief, Leach, is “a queer without being queer. He thinks like a chick you wouldn’t like with that, I certainly wouldn’t. Sometimes I wish he would stop fighting it and make the homosexual scene” (41). A total failure of life, a man of cheap tastes and vulgar ideas, he is so “lecherous that sexually speaking can’t be with a girl for more than one night” (49). The action of the play is electrified by the arrival of Cowboy, an ironic Messiah of the junkies:

If there is any hero, it is Cowboy, who gets the stuff, takes the risk involved in getting it, administers it to others, and behaves generally like the doctor which has white uniform makes us feel he is (43).

The Cowboy is, in fact, not the Saviour but a destroyer, his heroism is nihilistic and destructive, vicious and anti-social. No wonder, talking about the existence of the junkies in general, Ernie observes: “You have invited yourself to a den of vipers, sister Salvation. I’m sure you will find enough sins crossing your path

today. So leave me alone” (56). The climax comes when Leach is caught in an ineluctable trap of dope:

“I’m not high I’m not high at all. You know what I mean? I want more. Cowboy? Cowboy? You have some left. I’m not high. It’s mine Cowboy. Strictly speaking, it’s mine and I want some more. Everybody’s high and I’m not. You didn’t give me as much as you gave them” (Gelber, *The Connection* 85).

A victim of his illusion, Leach takes an overdose. His death is neither tragic nor pathetic, for his suicide is not a quest of any identity. In fact his life has been an utter waste. To quote Jaybird: “No doctors, no heroes, no martyrs, no Christs. That’s a very good score, I didn’t get burned. Maybe short counted, but not burned” (82).

Obviously the play has no hero to give. The inmates of the “junky den” are sick and decadent people whose life does not inspire us at all. It’s a pity that in the contemporary rotten society, only such junkies are the hopes of humanity. Their sickness and perversion symbolize the degradation of the American culture which manufactures illusions and dreams. No wonder Robert Brustein observed: “The most severe indictment of the evening is reserved for the audience, and, by extension, for society at large” (Brustein, *The Absurd and the Ridiculous* 30).

Thus Jack Gelber projected neurotics and sick protagonists who are unfit for any heroism. Symbolizing the “sick culture” of contemporary America, they are neither tragic nor pathetic as their quest for illusions deprive them of heroic glory and grandeur. Alienated and depressed, they emerge as lost souls, dull, morbid, sick and decadent. The neurotic junkies indulge in lewdness or homosexual perversion.

Gripped by neurotic despair, they seek escape from the stark realities of life instead of redeeming themselves through heroic struggle. No wonder, spiritually hollow and burdened with existential despair, they emerge as anti-heroes, belonging to the tradition of Ionesco, Genet, Beckett and Pinter.

Conclusion

In the present study the theme of evolution of the corrosion of self depicted in contemporary British, French and American drama is explored. In all the texts of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber the corrosion of self is predominant. The socio-political and economic forces in the post World War II era brought about tremendous changes in the society. The emergence of new psychological theories and an immense development in science and technology changed the whole scenario. Darwin's theory of evolution which explained that the birth of man is the result of a natural process caused the loss of faith in the age-old religious dimensions. The new nihilistic theories of Nietzsche that God is dead shook the validity of all conventions. The contemporary people became bereft of each type of solace, whether religious or philosophical. They found no answers to their questions. They stood aghast, bewildered, alienated and uprooted in the society to which they no longer belonged. All this led to the loss of moral values among the contemporary people which further marked the emergence of nihilism on the scene. Nihilism is characterized by the disappearance of all the moral values among the modern people. They have become more materialistic and selfish because of the ill-effects of the surrounding social and political circumstances. Industrialization, economic prosperity and growing urbanization resulted in disillusionment as Victorian attitudes of certainty, conservatism and objective truth disappeared. This break with the tradition is known as Modernism in the fields of literature and Arts. Modernism can be regarded as a concurrent search for new forms of expression. It included different types of experiments in the plot, settings, characterization, language and techniques employed in drama.

The post World War II writers were confused and they they were forced to evolve a new symbolical, existential and objective style to articulate the new existential experiences. Their writings were like scattered pieces of art and were less hopeful. This further led to a completely new trend in absurd, a unique offshoot of modernism. Absurd drama originated in the avant-garde experiments of the 1920s and 1930s. Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi* was the historical play in absurd art. It is a play that is regarded as unforgettable, nasty, devoid of all decorum and an outrage on society. The audience stood aghast in utter bewilderment, not knowing what it was all about. Thematically, the play was totally a new experience for them. The majority of the onlookers was confused and dumb-founded and was unable to decide whether whatever they had seen on the stage had any relation with their lives or not. They found it difficult to relate it to their familiar day- to-day experiences.

In the twentieth century, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre further propounded the theories of existentialism. Absurdism gained currency when Albert Camus published his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1942. Camus argued that humanity is in the grip of absurdism and it is very difficult to find a satisfying rational explanation of the universe. So absurdism is a philosophy stating that any efforts on the part of men to find any rational meaning in the universe will ultimately fail because no such meaning exists at all. The absurdist believes that the world has some meaning that is beyond the reach of human beings. The Theatre of the Absurd became popular with the emergence of writers like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter and Arthur Adomov. The absurdist writers have portrayed the characters residing in a world with which their connection is lost. The outside world for these characters is non-responsive. This becomes the cause of

their becoming mere puppets at the hands of the cruel forces of destiny. These characters are living a life in which they have no control over their actions. They feel alienated from the society and suffer corrosion of self.

Samuel Beckett broke with the traditional realistic theatre of Ibsen and Shaw and evolved new anti-theatrical devices to depict the corrosion of self in the Theatre of the Absurd. His vision of life is pessimistic and nihilistic as he depicted the picture of contemporary human beings through his characters that are tramps. *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are certainly the masterpieces. With the emergence of the scientific and psychological theories, human beings find themselves in crisis. They start considering themselves alienated from their roots, their past, culture, values, tradition, religion, ancestors and even parents. Every human being tries to seek solace in some religious or philosophical doctrine. But with the occurrence of the revolutionary thesis that God is dead, these people become demoralized. The result is the deflation of self. The characters in the plays of Beckett can be seen struggling constantly to escape from their self. This state of mind is effectively portrayed by Beckett in his play *Waiting for Godot* through his characters. The characters just sit and wait for someone else named Godot to come and bring an improvement in their situation doing them nothing at all. They are completely the embodiments of non-action, waiting only for someone else to come and define their existence and give a meaning to their lost identities. They wait for Godot because the act of waiting gives them something to do. Waiting gives them the illusion that they are doing something meaningful. It does not really matter whether Godot exists or not, or who or what he is. Godot may represent nothing but a vague promise, supplication, entreaty, or he may represent food, a warm and dry place to sleep in

and a roof over their heads. He may be God or he may be nobody. The most important thing is that Godot is the representative of something or somebody to wait for. For both the tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, he may be a goal, an objective.

The most interesting trait in all the protagonists of Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber Beckett is their corrosion of self. The socio-political circumstances became the reason for the displacement of self. Ionesco and Genet were the pioneers who reacted against the traditional form of drama. They realized that the contemporary situation was completely different from the Victorians and the Georgians. They had witnessed the World Wars, depression and the nuclear Holocaust. The contemporary society had degenerated; it had become a valueless society. There was no God who could save them from the malaise of human existence. Man felt alienated from his roots and culture. The evolution of the Theatre of the Absurd was the result of nihilism, pessimism and inertia. Beckett has dramatized this trait of his characters very realistically. The characters are neurotics and escapists. Beckett's heroes are modern anti-heroes. The mythical hero, here, has petered out into the modern un-heroic heroes of Beckett and other absurd dramatists. The hero's stature here is shrunk from the titanic to the plunge. Critics such as Victor Brombert and Northrop Frye have lucidly traced the descent of the warrior hero into the modern anti-hero. Brombert suggests three stances: with the supernatural, with the society or the group and with itself.

The supernatural stance is generally applied to the mythical or medieval hero. It involves the hero's confrontation with the supernatural powers of gods, fairies or monsters. The mythical hero is a master of prodigious physical powers,

endowed with superior gifts of head, heart and hand. He sets in quest for his aim and gets involved with the supernatural powers. Aptly epitomizing the Greek hero's relationship with the supernatural powers, Victor Brombert writes:

At his best, the ancient hero had something of the divine in him. God, demi-God, Godlike or intimate with gods, he provides a transcendental link between the contingencies of the finite and the imagined realm of the supernatural (Brombert, *The Hero in Literature* 11).

In the medieval times, which witnessed a shift from the pagan to the Christian vision of the world, and the rise of Feudalism, courtly life and complex class structure, the mythical hero was replaced by a chivalrous hero. The romantic knight displays feats of arms, loyalty to the ruler and fidelity to his lady love. Like the mythical hero, he too understands and keeps a constant quest which brings him into the temporal realms of the supernatural forces. The mythical hero's movement is motivated by destiny and he is constantly under the supervision of gods and goddesses. The knight errant, on the other hand, is not guided by any supernatural power or at least, he is not conscious of it. The knight's quest is a series of aimless wanderings in search of an object which usually seems increasingly vague even to him.

The changing socio-ethical values leave little scope for the ancient or traditional heroes. The cataclysmic changes demand the hero to be the representative of the society. Hegel writes in this context that it is time that under the present condition of the civilized world, a man may act independently for himself in many

directions, the fact remains that in whatever direction, he may turn, he is still only a member of a fixed order of society and appears as such limited in his range rather than the vital representative and individual embodiment of society itself. Beckett's protagonists are anti-heroes who are the victims of the corrosion of self. They are neither mythical having some assistance of supernatural powers, nor are they chivalrous, who indulge in their knightly feats. They lack the prodigious physical power and are not endowed with superior gifts of head, heart and hand. Like the mythical heroes, they don't set in quest for their aim because they don't have any particular aim in their life. They are the modern anti-heroes having none of the great qualities of the traditional hero. Rather, they possess un-heroic qualities. Heroes are defeated by time and process of history, but anti-heroes go on living, thinking, binding their time. Beckett's protagonists have no ambition, no special purpose, no place to go, only a place to which they are confined.

Beckett was a trend setter in drama as he broke from the conventional form of theatre and introduced anti-theatrical techniques. His plays broke all the rules by dispensing with traditional concepts of the plot, scene and character. Beckett offered a new kind of plays which broke entirely fresh ground. They were unconventional in respect of their character-portrayal as well as their plot-construction. They were unconventional also in not depicting the dramatic conflict in the accepted sense of the word. In fact, in Beckett's plays, there was an all-round deficiency of action, characterization, and emotion. And yet, his plays got immense popularity. No other dramatist had ever taken so great a risk before Beckett to make use of minimal plots and dying dialogues to dramatize the life in which everything is uncertain, incomplete and collapsing. To a very large extent, Beckett has stripped down action,

situation, emotion and characterization in *Waiting for Godot*. It may be noted, however, that the stripping down process can go much further as Beckett himself went on to prove in *Endgame*. Compared to any of other characters of Beckett, Vladimir and Estragon are highly articulate persons possessing a sharp sensitivity. They are portrayed by Beckett as the characters who view themselves unworthy and incompetent. These characters are shown under the influence of the contemporary social as well as political forces. Surrounded by the dark gulf of World War II and the changing scenario of the religious fields, these characters stood completely bewitched and confused. They were the exclusive outcome of the society which was then undergoing huge changes. All the protagonists in the play *Waiting for Godot* have been depicted as the characters who have lost the connection between their thoughts and action. Devoid of reasoning power, they are dramatized as unable to withstand the immense pressure of the demands of the fast developing world. They have become the victims of schizophrenic tendencies marked by severely impaired thinking, emotions and behaviour. They are completely unaware of their personal needs and grooming. They have lost the touch with reality. They are shown torn between their thoughts and actions and constantly suffering from the feelings of fear and anxiety.

The deflated characters in the play have no centre in their lives to provide them foundation. So the things fall apart. Vladimir and Estragon are virtually tramps. They are under the process of entropy. They are split personalities. They are just puppets in the hands of the incurable forces of heredity, instinct and environment. This results in the portrayal of characters more or less as animals devoid of rationality and decision-making powers. According to them, being rational

is a sin. Beckett has portrayed the characters as representatives of human decay and figures of disgust that live in a barren and futile world. They are the victims of hallucinations, nightmares and above all pessimism. They find no ray of hope anywhere in the world. Neither do they have the courage to rebel against the derogatory conditions of their life and thus bring an improvement in it nor do they show any sign of willingness that they want any change in their condition. No doubt, sometimes they get fed up with the futility and meaninglessness of their lives, but still they don't want to step forward with an initiative to find a solution. They are suffering from the loss of confidence in themselves. In fact they are constantly struggling to escape from their self. The true self of all the protagonists of the play is deluded because the ground of their being is nothingness, everything is made of nothing and the characters are loitering to escape from their distorted self. Vladimir and Estragon are deflated personalities bound to lead a stagnant life devoid of any action and movement. They are waiting for Godot who never appears on the stage. After an endless waiting for two long days, they decide to continue it even the following day. They don't know the whereabouts of Godot and also they mistake Pozzo as Godot. Their knowing nothing about Godot is made clear from the following words of Vladimir, "True... We don't know him very well... but all the same..." (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* 16).

Vladimir and Estragon are the victims of corrosion of self as they don't have the capacity to overcome their miserable conditions. Instead, they are waiting endlessly for their messiah or super hero to appear on the scene and drag them out of their poignant and unavoidable circumstances and to provide them with a shelter, food and above all a meaning to their life and lost identity.

Vladimir: “Let’s wait and see what he says.”

Estragon: “Who?”

Vladimir: “Godot.”

Estragon: “Good idea” (Beckett, *Godot* 10).

Despite his horrifying treatment at the hands of his master, Lucky remains faithful and has never tried to run away. This shows that Lucky does not want to regain his lost identity. He is contented with his life no matter how derogatory it is. Beckett himself has referred to Pozzo as mad. Once he advised the American director Alan Schneider that the only way to play him is to play him mad. Everything in the world of Estragon and Vladimir is so tormenting that they have forgotten their real identities. There is a never-ending instability, restlessness, hopelessness and helplessness all around. They don’t know who they are, where they have to go, whom they have to meet or not. They lack will-power and are passive too. It is dramatized that more than four or five times they decide to give up waiting and quit the place but each time they don’t move at all. Estragon always insists on leaving while Vladimir always suggests waiting until Godot comes. Estragon, who is always short of patience, doesn’t move even having decided to go. He says, “I am going” (Beckett, *Godot* 4). The world of Vladimir and Estragon is the world full of uncertainty and the only certainty lying in it is the waiting for Godot. Exemplifying the typically deflated personalities, both Vladimir and Estragon don’t possess the proper communication qualities and it is one of the interesting traits of their deflated personalities. They cannot converse in an efficient manner because being the lost selves; they don’t possess enough confidence to do so. Vladimir says, “Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other... (He searches for the contrary of saved.) damned” (4).

The deflated characters feel themselves alienated and estranged from the society in which they are residing and this becomes further the cause of their escape from self. They are the victims of the process of entropy. Entropy is a process or leveling of energy in this universe where all the distinctions are obliterated and the characters are introduced to an unstructured world rather than an ordered one. So the world in *Waiting for Godot* is a world which is highly unstructured and disordered. No set patterns and laws to lead an acceptable life are offered. The characters don't know where to go and what to do. This loss of motive brings deflation in them. They have nothing to do but to wait for Godot. Estragon says in this context, "What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment" (Beckett, *Godot* 2). The nothingness of their life is revealed efficiently. They have nothing to do, nothing to achieve and nothing with which to achieve, and nothing to express: ESTRAGON: "You wanted to speak to me? You had something to say to me?" (51).

The theme of corrosion of self is depicted through unconventional anti-theatrical devices. In the plays of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Pinter, language degenerates, communication falters, characters and personality disintegrate. Shorn of all certainties, these dramatists are confronting a world in which God is dead, a world which, in the existential sense, is absurd. It has been suggested that Beckett's preoccupation with the problems of being is quite significant in his plays. He is seriously concerned with the problem of the identity of the self. Beckett highlighted the metaphysical despair and absurdity that gripped the post World War II humanity. It is thus inevitable that Beckett's theatre is an instrument for the expression of the individual's obsessions, nightmares, and anxiety.

Thus, Beckett has sufficiently portrayed the derogatory conditions of his characters. They can be termed as neurotics being the victims of schizophrenic tendencies. They are split personalities having no connection between their thoughts and actions and that is why they are passive figures of non-action. They don't possess any intellectual quality, rather they are indecisive. They indulge in futile talk and actions. All this proves that there is an inevitable escape from self in the characters of the play. They are the lost selves who appear as if they are afraid of taking a step toward development and success will instead ruin them. They just sit and observe the things happening around, no matter how awesome. So in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, there is an inevitable corrosion of self.

Tennessee Williams is another American playwright who depicted the theme of corrosion of self in his dramas. He was dissatisfied with the realistic theatre of his times because he believed that the society had disintegrated. Williams evolved his own dramatic technique to depict the corrosion of self of the American women. They are trapped and truncated depicting the image of anti-heroic women. Williams evolves myths and rituals to portray the disintegration of self. All of his women - Amanda, Laura, Maggie, Blanche and Maggie - are truncated women with fractured identity. They long for the glory and glamour of the past, and since the escape from history is impossible, their struggle leads them to despair, sickness and morbidity. No wonder Mary becomes a dope-fiend, Blanche is obsessed with the values of plantation life now lost to her. Amanda, Laura, and Maggie disintegrate as they fail to live in the face of uncertainty and loneliness. Grippled by guilt and alienation, they seek ecstasy in illusions. The vision of Tennessee Williams was romantic; he used the image of fading beauty, of Southern Belle. He took up the main themes of the death of the young, violence, loss of love, sexuality, promiscuity and perversions.

The appearance of the *A Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway created sensation in the drama circle with the creation of Blanche Dubois. She was a realistic portrayal of an American woman suffering from the corrosion of self. Blanche is haunted by so many deaths in the family. She expresses the cause of her stress to her sister, Stella, thus: "All of those deaths! The long parade of the graveyard! Father, mother!" (Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* 479). She enjoyed American sexual liberty, developed intimacy with school boys for sexual gratification. She was rated as a town prostitute and eventually was dismissed from the school. She lost her name, honour and job and was completely cut off from the society. Blanche used short term mechanism to cope with her stress. She left her city and started her journey in quest of security and stability. She entered into New Orleans where her sister, Stella, lived with her husband, Stanley. This was a new world for her; she used alcohol as a tool to gain confidence in life. Blanche continued believing that she was a pure woman, quite elegant in her manners and tastes and exhibited all the traits of Southern Belle. Her conflict with Stanley is the main interest in the drama. For Stanley, Blanche's life is full of lies which she uses in order to manipulate others. In the Seventh Scene, Stanley exposes her dirty past to Mitch. Phony "paper moon symbolizes her double life, one real and the other illusive and false" (293). The tragic story of Blanche represents the fall of American women when values are fast changing. Her corrosion of self results from her false ideas about herself and her tenacious hold of the old past that has gone onto history. Blanche is guilt-ridden; she understands that she never shared emotional intimacy with her husband that caused his death. She loves darkness since it can conceal her flaws and fallacies. Edward Albee is known as the poet of loss and frustration since

he depicted the dilemmas of the American people who were leading a life of sickness and despair. He created lost and fragmented souls such as Jerry, Martha, Nick and Honey in the avant-garde theatre. The protagonists of Albee are sick and morbid because they live in an eternal void. The Theatre of the Absurd projected a reality beyond the limits of logic. Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter experienced a deep sense of loss, despair and hopelessness.

Edward Albee depicts the theme of corrosion of self through Peter-Jerry confrontation in his play *The Zoo Story*. This confrontation results into the corrosion of self of Jerry and Peter. Peter's life is symbolic of the American middle-class snob. Jerry is created as the foil to Peter (Albee, *The Zoo Story* 14). Loneliness as a spiritual condition had always attracted the Greek and Elizabethan dramatists. Hamlet also suffered loneliness but his loneliness brought order out of chaos but the alienation of Jerry and George debases them and they eventually become sick, morbid and neurotic. Tom Stoppard also belongs to the tradition of avant-garde drama. His vision was to depict the corrosion of self of his protagonists who live under fear and uncertainty. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the victims of external forces. They are bewildered because they are too fragile to cope with the existential burden. Gelber's junkies are neurotics agonized by the corrosion of self. They are non-entities suffering extreme despair that stems from their meaningless existence. The playwrights considered in the preceding chapters represent a peak of dramatic achievement. They have depicted the gradual corrosion of the self of the protagonists. Their quest is the parody of the quest of the great Greek and Elizabethan heroes. Blanche resorts to sexual promiscuity, George to illusion mongering, Leach to dope and Allan to homosexual perversions. Feelings alienated

the protagonists of Beckett, Albee, Williams, Gelber and Tom Stoppard and they distrust truth, justice and love and negate everything in desperation. Conceived under the influence of Freudian and neo-Freudian theories, the modern protagonist is a neurotic and disintegrated self. Reacting against mimetic, humanistic and psychological theories of drama, the modern protagonists are trapped by existential forces and engulfed by spiritual doom. They have to live with illusions to suffer corrosion of self. In the tragic pattern, the individual is purged of his guilt and readmitted into society. He restores order in a heroic way. Against such conventional glorifying heroism, we find the protagonists of Beckett and the fragile heroines of Tennessee. Tom Stoppard wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* in imitation of Pirandello and Ionesco and Genet. Stoppard believes that old values are meaningless as human beings create their own values through their consciousness. He believes that identity or value must be created by the individual. By posing the acts that constitute him or her, they make their existence more significant. Stoppard articulated the absurdity of life in his play and propagated the philosophy of Sartre that "existence precedes essence". The personality of Hamlet is not the creation of any impersonal force but the outcome of his own choice and individuality. Existentialism tends to focus on the question of human existence and the conditions of this existence. What is meant by existence is the concrete life of each individual and his concrete ways of being in the world. It is pertinent to note that the dope addicts of Gelber depicted in the play *The Connection* are vicious, corrupting and nihilistic. Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber deal with inferiority complex, paranoia, schizophrenia and neurosis. Instead of behaving like men with transcendental vision, their characters become the victims of psychic pressures, deflated and de-sublimated protagonists.

To conclude, in the present thesis all the objectives have been achieved as the important plays of Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber have been investigated with a new perspective for the knowledge of the scholars of British and American theatre. The corrosion of self is at once a new and fresh perspective as all the protagonists are burdened with the absurdities and uncertainties of life. They live in a void and feel that life is meaningless and all struggle is futile, the only reality is inescapable suffering. Estragon's observation of man being born mad and remaining mad throughout his life, in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, is a true reflection of the predicament of modern man. The socio-economic situations are very challenging even today as the youth is lost and directionless. The contemporary playwrights are only interested in conceiving protagonists who are lost, disintegrated and neurotic beings. The plays of David Babe, David Manet Neil Simon and Tyrone Guthrie continue this journey of deflation of self. The Broadway comedy projects the corrosion of self of the protagonists. *The Odd Couple* (1965), *The Subject Was Roses* (1964), *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1964), *Hogan's Goat* (1965), *Mrs. Dolly Has a Lover* (1962), *Slow Dance on the Killing Ground* (1964) depict the sick and neurotic protagonists in continuation of the tradition of Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Tom Stoppard and Jack Gelber.

The present study is highly useful for the scholars of British and American drama as they would be able to continue the research from the psychoanalytical perspective. The anti-theatrical techniques explored in this thesis would help the budding writers to articulate the modern complexities of life. Drama has become very popular these days with the rise of democratic governments in the world and most of the social and political problems of the society are expressed through the

street theatre performed during election time. The thesis has social relevance as its reading will inspire the budding playwrights to introduce anti-theatrical techniques. The modern man is burdened with the anxieties and absurdities of life as life has become very competitive and survival is very hard. The present thesis will give the youth the direction to confront the existential reality boldly.

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